

## From Nuwanda, With Love

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# From Nuwanda, With Love

by [justahappy littletree](#)

## Summary

*Knox has gone round the twist. He met some girl at the Danburys. The poor man's face has been stuck with that look of adoration on it since he saw her. I hope he snaps out of it soon. I'm his best man, his friend. If there's anyone that he is missing out on, it's me and my wondrous jokes*

\*

Charlie is in love. And all he can do is watch and wait for his heart to give up.

# Prologue

## Chapter Notes

This fic exists in the same universe as my previous fic Mignight Feast -- reading it might help you follow events to come more easily! (Although if you don't its completely fine!)

I also made a spotify playlist for this fic!

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6uDtlkyp0r7YuhJir6iI3f?si=qJlTjxEgTp6FN3ZbeeXdyw>

**\*\*A note (this can also be found in the final chapter notes):** the way that the Dead Poets Society (film) exoticifies and treats indigenous American communities is wrong. I regret not expressing this in this fic. More importantly, I encourage you to support and listen to native people - such as acknowledging the lands you live on (x), and supporting indigenous activism such as the Land Back movement (x) and other decolonial movements (x, x).

**If found please return this diary to:**

*Charles Benjamin Dalton*

**Reward for return is:**

*My deepest gratitude, respect and my last two Camel cigarettes.*

*NOTE: If your name happens to be Richard Cameron - start a fire, burn this diary and then kindly jump into the flames.*

# Welcome to Hellton

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

August 27th 1959

It's *that* time of year again.

Charlie hasn't ever wanted anything as badly as to get out of this stuffy hall with it's cloying smell of wax and the stale waft of breath coming from one of the old alumni in the row in front of him. The old broad coughs into his palm and wipes it on the bench discreetly, then turns to shake Charlie's hand. *Ugh.*

Next to him, Mother simpers and nods at the other adults. At least *she's* trying to keep up appearances.

Charlie looks around quickly, twisting in his pew. There's Neil a few rows ahead. And Meeks is with his parents. Is that Pitts' head or not? Probably, it is the same rectangle shape after all. And where is Knox? *Where is that damned Mr Overstreet?*, Charlie says it in his head with the same leering authority as Nolan, smirking to himself a little. That *could* be Knox a few rows behind him...the man in the suit doesn't look like Knox's father though-

Mother clears her throat and gives him an imploring look out of the corner of her eye. One that says *don't cause any trouble*. Charlie is used to it, has seen it more times than he can count. With a sigh, he stiffens and looks ahead.

They're lighting the poor newcomers' candles for them. Charlie remembers the rush of adrenalin as the wick takes the flame, the pressure of passing the flame on without it going out. The way his hands had been slick with sweat and how the candle twisted like putty in his grip.

That was at the very start of his years at Welton. He hadn't slept for weeks before the first term, it had loomed over him like a gray cloud. The first time he put on his uniform, four years ago, he thought he was going to go mad from the itching of pressed fabric. The first year at Welton had been...difficult. Charlie didn't take to rules all that well.

Of course now he was molded, he had warped and changed and come out in the rigid mold that everyone goes through here. The boredom, the tedious droll of day after day, the tight, unyielding, endless list of rules. Welton is a place where boys go to become disciplined - and discipline Charlie it had. For the most part anyway...

"-asked the same question that now greets you every semester: Gentlemen, what are the four pillars?" Nolan is saying.

The students all rise to stand. Charlie sighs and gets up. This never gets old, does it?

"Tradition! Honour! Discipline! Excellence!" The call sounds in unison. Like a sacred hymn or something. A war cry, maybe.

They all sit back down as one. Charlie leans back in his pew and watches as Nolan's mouth opens and shuts again and again. Words go in one ear and out the other. Mother simpers. Neil, Meeks and the others are all looking determinedly ahead. More words. Charlie claps along with everyone else and sighs. This time of the year is always the same. The same speeches. The same faces. The same words. How many more hours until he gets a breath of fresh air? Four. Maybe three if he's lucky. But if anyone asks he isn't counting.

\*

Finally it's over! Freedom!

They all file out of the hall in packs, in little groups of proud parents and their perfect child. Mother has one hand gripping Charlie's arm so tightly he wonders if it will fall off. He forces an easy grin on his face and hopes it will stay there.

He cranes his neck to catch another glimpse of the new english teacher, but can't make out a thing through the sea of people. Mr Keating. He seemed young - younger than any of the other teachers at least. When was the last time a new teacher had been brought in? Charlie can hardly remember. It's always the same senile handful of old folk that belong someplace at home, in front of a fire...not to sound too harsh.

Charlie steels himself for the obligatory small talk with Nolan. To look the man in his watery blue eyes and puff his chest out and sound confident enough for himself and Mother. He'll do it because he has to

- and because he knows there's a cup of punch and a tiny cucumber sandwich waiting for him in the refreshments tent outside in the parking lot.

Here he goes-

"Mr Dalton. How's your father?"

Mother tightens her grip on Charlie's arm so tightly that his eyes tear up. Her fingers dig into him like nervous claws.

Hmph. Charlie has a lot of options to pick from. Busy. Too busy to be here in fact. Selflessly giving all he has to provide for his family. Being a tragic everyman, a pillar of strength and goodness. Still as loving as ever...it's doubtful that Nolan would even pick up on the sarcasm.

"He's just fine, Sir." Charlie replies. He even throws in a little nod for reassurance. It earns him a thin-lipped smile and a firm handshake. Perfect performance.

Mother's grip doesn't loosen on his arm until he's finishing off the last of the sandwich platters outside.

\*

"Have you packed everything?" Mother asks. Her voice is almost drowned out by the sound of the seventh graders' sobbing and the rising swell of parent's talking and talking.

They're standing next to the neatly trimmed lawn in the parking lot. A pristine green square, as orderly as Welton itself. Charlie's suitcase is at his feet.

He nods. He is taller than her now, after years of trying to catch up his height. His hands are stuck stubbornly in his pockets. Mother arranges her mouth in a tight smile and nods. Her eyes stay downcast, as Charlie knew they would, and don't move from his suitcase on the pavement.

"Promise me you'll behave yourself?"

"I promise."

He really hates this part.

If the words wouldn't choke him, maybe he could muster the courage to speak: *Look after yourself. I'm sorry I can't stay. I don't want you all*

*alone in the house with him. With the raging silence. You won't have anyone to talk to now. To take to the grocery store or to church. To hold up Father's attention and keep him out of one of his moods. To share his silence.*

But this year, like every year, he doesn't say anything. The words swirl around inside him and he swallows them bitterly. It makes him want to gag.

"Look, I really should be going-"

"I'll call you if you'd like that." She says lightly, smiling at his suitcase. It's a weak attempt at saying something. Neither of them are much good at saying what needs to be said.

They both know calls are forbidden at Welton - even if it was an emergency, all calls have to go straight through Mr Nolan first.

They both know she won't ring. She doesn't use the phone without asking Charlie's father for permission first. And besides, she says this same line every year. It's yet to happen.

"Thank you." Charlie says, trying to sound grateful. He smiles mechanically, hands digging deeper into his pockets. It's a wonder they haven't gone straight through them yet.

Should he move in for a hug? She probably wouldn't want that. Or she would flinch and pull away and they would act like nothing ever happened-

"My son," She almost sounds *proud*. "There, there." Her hand pats Charlie's cheek quickly. She smiles a little too wide and glances into his face for a second or two.

"When I see you again, you'll be a man! My little Charles." She shakes her head in disbelief.

He ducks down and she plants a kiss on his forehead.

"My boy." She murmurs. Her hands grip his shoulders a little too tightly, like she's trying to keep him there. Her eyes are searching his face. For what?

He's itching for a cigarette.

"Goodbye." He says slowly.

His hands twitch. His lungs cry out for the familiar warm smoke. Just to hold one between his fingers even if it burns.

"Goodbye Charlie."

He needs to get out and have a smoke. He needs to find his friends. He needs to go now.

He pushes the rising waves of whatever *this* feeling is down in his stomach. He'll go find his friends. Share a cigarette. Make them laugh. Sink back into the comfort of familiarity. Let it calm him. Like every year.

Mother pats his shoulder lamely. The ghost of her kiss lingers on his forehead. He can't bring himself to wipe it off in front of her.

Charlie has the rest of the day ahead of him, right? The whole day to smoke and lounge around and listen to the other's stories of their great summers and laugh at the right parts and listen to whispers about the new english teacher and settle into this *life* that he can never bring himself to embrace fully.

He would never admit it, but maybe it wasn't such a bad thing being back at Welton after all.

August 27th 1959

Dear Diary,

Today was the first day back. It was better than expected fine. I think it's hardest on Mother but she doesn't like to talk about it. Every year she seems less eager for me to leave and I understand. It makes me feel worse. She wouldn't want me to worry, she tells me that all the time, so maybe just this once I can try to put her out of my mind.

There's a new kid! He's an Anderson of all people. I bet Nolan kissed his shoes on the way out of the hall earlier. His name is Todd. He seems plain. The quiet type. He barely opened his mouth once all day. Neil seems to have taken a shine to him though. That's Neil for you, always seeing the good before anything else.

I don't know how he does it. It's bad enough Mr Perry is making him ditch the annual. He talks to Neil like he's a tree that will grow right

with enough discipline. I guess all of our father's are like that. Or maybe that's just Neil and I. From the times I've met him, Mr Overstreet was warm. He was proud of Knox anyway, you could see it in his eyes. But that's Knox - he wins people over just by being himself.

Despite everything I'm glad to see everyone again. Even Stick. When did it become that I'm happier seeing them all than I am seeing myself in the mirror? I'm going soft. The summer does that. Makes me forget how things are here, and then it all comes rushing back like a wind. Like I never left.

It's late. Cameron still has the light on. The bastard is playing chess with himself. Himself! How obnoxious can you get? He keeps discussing tactics with the wall. He's a jerk, as Knox would say. Or a candy ass. Why did I have to land with him as my roommate? Instead of Knox? I'd even take Meeks. This dorm can't be big enough for the two of us. I'm going to go mad if I have to listen to his nagging every day.

I'm going to call it a night. Today has been too long and I already have trig first thing in the morning. And there's a study group for Latin tomorrow night too. I didn't miss the actual work. I hope this Mr Keating isn't an old crone like the rest of the teachers here or I'll eat my textbook.

Yours,  
Charlie.

## Chapter End Notes

I never realised how hard it is to write in character sometimes lol. Also peek the hint of angsty Charlie..

Let me know what you think! Kudos and comments are my lifeblood!

:)

# To Indeed Be A God

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

August 28th 1959

Dear Diary,

So maybe I was wrong about Keating. He's a madman. But he's funny. He's a little strange (my father would put it down to him being one of those Beatnik types...) but he is a hell of a lot more alive than any other teacher around here. He actually breathes and smiles and has a light in his eyes. A teacher that makes jokes? That isn't old enough to remember the Great War? I'll bite.

I'm not completely sold on him yet. Maybe he isn't as great as we all hope. Maybe he just acts nice to win us over and then he's really a twisted cold fool. Maybe not. But at least it's something to think about right?

I haven't started any of my history assignments yet. Three per week! My hand is going to come clean off if I'm not careful. I'll get Meeks to help me. He's good at that kind of thing.

Knox is going for dinner at the Danburys' tonight. Lucky him. It will probably be real boring. The Danburys are awfully stuck up anyway. But that means he won't be there for dinner tonight. He was asking about my summer earlier but now he won't get to hear about it. That's his loss.

He asked after Father too. I pretended not to hear him. We were in the showers anyway so it's not like that's too far fetched. It does get deafening...I don't think my ears have been the same since I first step foot in there. So I asked him about his summer and he talked my ear off for the next hour.

I don't mean to sound harsh, I'm grateful. Knox is a good friend. He knows when I want a smoke, he always has one to share and he has stuck up for me before...more than I deserve. He even lets me copy his chemistry sometimes. He says he wants to join the school paper so we can both be proofers. I'd like that. We can hang out more. Smoke. Kick pebbles. Talk maybe. It'll give me something to look forward to.

I've got to go to dinner soon. Without Knox am I going to have to talk

to Cameron? I would rather jump off the chapel next to the games pitch.

I forgot how boring things get around here. But maybe it's a good thing.

Will write later,  
Charlie.

\*

September 7th 1959

Dear Diary

This is going to be quick.

We are going to sneak out tonight. Me, Knox, Todd, Charlie, Meeks, Pitts. Cameron too sadly.

It's the Dead Poets Society! To make women swoon! To resurrect Gods! To build worlds with our words! To dare to live deliberately! I haven't felt this excited about something since Phyllis Willard asked me to meet her at the church fair last summer. Hopefully this goes well.

P.S

Knox has gone round the twist. He met some girl at the Danburys. Catherine? Coleen? It doesn't matter what her name is. He won't see her again anyway. She'll forget about him this time next week. The poor man's face has been stuck with that look of adoration on it since he saw her. I hope he snaps out of it soon. I'm his best man, his friend. If there's anyone that he is missing out on, it's me and my wondrous jokes.

Carpe diem,  
Charlie

*Meeks! Meeks! Meeks!*

The chant rises upwards like hellfire. Like a call of the wild. A prayer to whatever gods are out there.

The cave may be small but not too small for them to march in circles, whooping and clapping and laughing so hard tears roll down their cheeks. Even Todd (*are you an amoeba or a man?*) is enjoying himself.

It is glorious.

*Then I saw the Congo, creeping through the black-* Meeks leads the parade. They're all yelling into the dim, voices shrill and buoyant with joy.

- *Cutting through the jungle with a golden track!* Torches, heavy in their hands, cast shadows up and down the walls in a rippling wave of dark shapes. There's flashes of faces full of life and wonder; Neil, Todd, Meeks, Pitts and Cameron. And Knox of course. Knox, who, for one night, has let himself forget that about Chris and is joining in on the fun with all his heart. Knox whose smile is blinding in the dark.

*Then I saw the Congo, keeping through the black-*

Charlie could get used to this. This...*sucking the marrow of life*. His heart is pulsing hard with the force of *fun* for once. His mind is racing a hundred thousand miles per hour, reeling with flashes of his friends overjoyed faces. Their smiles. Their laughs. The warm circle of life they've drawn themselves into tonight.

*Cutting through the jungle with a golden track!* Charlie shouts it so hard his throat hurts. He doesn't care. He doesn't care at all.

No Mother to worry about. No Father to try to forget. No rules. No mold to squeeze into. No stern voices and cold eyes. No Chris.

Is this what flying feels like? The wind in your hair and your eyes opened for the first time, to all the things you could only dream of seeing? Charlie is on fire and he is ready for it to consume him, to destroy him and rebuild him; to make him *whole*.

They've made their way into the forest. The trees tower above them like the gods of old. The air swirls overhead with ferocious life. With something magical and full of power that stirs in Charlie, deep in his bones. Like something is waking up inside him that's been asleep too long. Like an epiphany in the dark. Like an oasis in the desert. Like a divine gift from beyond.

Charlie stops and opens his arms wide, turns his palms up to the night

sky. His whole body is charged with energy, he can feel it in every single part of him - every single atom. The others stop. He can sense them still. All eyes are on him.

He throws his head back and decides to start his verse in this stupid wonderful life.

"I here and now commit myself to daring! To living deliberately! To the dead poets!"

His cry goes up into the stars.

Charlie's eyes are squeezed shut. Something will happen. Some power will come down and bless him. Some power will open up his soul and fill him with the wisdom and words of the poets gone before him. It's like the air is tingling. He waits. Any minute now. He waits and waits. His blood is rushing in his ears and he waits for it-

A hand claps down on his shoulder, gripping him hard. Like it's tethering him to the ground or the very earth. He shivers.

Charlie opens his eyes.

Knox squeezes his shoulder tighter and smiles,

"To the dead poets!" He says to the sky.

"To the dead poets!" They all echo.

Does Charlie really need to be the vessel for the ghosts of the poets past when he has these poets right in front of him?

He wants Knox's hand to stay on his shoulder, to anchor him to this warmth that's filling him, looking at the shining faces surrounding him under the moonlight. Charlie wonders vaguely if he's going to explode. Or simply drop dead on the spot. His heart is pounding so hard it feels he's been struck by lightning.

"Come on." Knox pulls back and the cold threatens to engulf Charlie.

*No. Wait, just...don't go yet-*

"Charlie?" Knox says softly.

Charlie swallows hard and tries to focus on the thrum of his heart but it's not as loud as before. If Knox could just put his hand back on Charlie's shoulder, maybe he would feel *it* again. Whatever *it was*. *The*

*spirit of connection, like he's part of something bigger than himself. Like he's channeling something lost, something that's been lying in his bones all this time. Like a current of light is travelling down his spine, making his hair stand on end. Whatever that is, Knox must have set it off. Charlie swallows hard again.*

The pale faces that surround him are still smiling, lit up by the lady moon herself. His friends (and Cameron). They all look breathless. They're here to *live*.

"Well don't stop your chanting! Someone go on! Pitts! My man! Read us something! Do it for the poets!" Charlie says, his mouth working its way into a smile again.

They all cheer. The warmth and determination and poetry and life settles back into their cheeks, glowing like stars.

Charlie feels *it* fade away again, back to wherever it came from, away into the dark. But - a tiny glimmer sits and stays. It nestles inside him, just a small spark. *But it's there*. His heart pounds a little faster.

Whatever this is, it's going to linger a little longer. This living deliberately, daring and sucking the marrow from life....maybe it *does* work.

With a whoop he throws himself back into the fray and is greeted with a cheer. Their voices drift up into the night. Their cheeks burn with daring and their eyes are bright with life for the first time.

Charlie wants to take this feeling, this *freedom* and keep it safe. Seal it up. Hold it tight to his chest and selfishly hide it away. And yet he wants to take it and share it with the others so it can be like this always and forever. So they can know no different to what they know tonight.

"It's my turn! Hand it over!" He shouts and is passed the book of poems.

His face is burning still with *that* feeling. The one that's gleaming in his heart. The one that makes him feel like a god. The one that went away when Knox pulled his hand back. Charlie is giddy. Drunk on life. He opens it up and starts reading, full of passion and spirit and wonder.

The Dead Poets last into the night, sharing a frenzied love for life and love and the words that bring them together.

*This* is what it is to feel alive.

He could get used to this.

Chapter End Notes

Oh to experience an awakening of more than one kind on a night of poetic revelry with friends.....

Stay safe out there everyone!

# We're All Food For Worms

## Chapter Notes

Just a heads up for description of a panic attack in this chapter.

Stay safe everyone!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

September 23rd 1959

Smoke billows from the corner of his mouth and he blows it out the window. It tastes harsh, like powdery ashes. His throat will probably ache tomorrow. *So be it.* The end of his cigarette glows like a hot coal. It's raining outside.

Charlie is sitting in Neil and Todd's dorm, on the window sill with the window open as wide as it can go. The sill isn't exactly comfortable but as he draws his knees up to his chest and holds them there with his free arm, it's not exactly terrible either.

He could have sat on his *own* window sill in his *own* dorm room but that bootlicker Cameron is in there doing his chemistry questions. Charlie isn't in the mood to talk to him right now. (...*Is he ever?*) He isn't really in the mood to talk to *anyone* right now.

He takes another drag and watches the rain pelt the window. It smells damp out there. Or is that just these dorms? They're so old they're probably rotting from the inside out. He just sighs and watches the smoke curl its way out into the evening air.

The others (except for Cameron of course) are all at tonight's study group. For maths? Or is it Latin? Whatever it is, Charlie doesn't care. He's spent enough time with his head in his books. He just wants to be left alone. It's tiring being around people all of the time. Even if they are his friends.

He has been pretty restless since that first DPS meeting. He's thought about it every waking moment and every night in his bed. It's almost a gift and a curse all at once; now that his eyes have been opened to how he *could* be living, he can't stop thinking about it. Can't stop seeing how things could be different. How he should be doing so much more with his life.

Still, he has the door slightly ajar, so he can hear potential footsteps

coming down the hall. He isn't so brave that he would challenge the rules completely. A call to Nolan's office is a call to Nolan's office, whether Charlie wants to live freely or not. As much as he would love to challenge the authority around here, he isn't quite *that* brave yet. Or *desperate*, he thinks to himself stonily.

The DPS meeting isn't the reason he's sulking up here. The meeting was fantastic. The most free he has felt in a long time. No, it's not the meeting.

*It's Knox.*

Or to be particular, it's Knox and his obsession with Chris.

She's all he ever talks about. Her pretty smile. Her tinkling laugh. The way her fair hair falls so perfectly, she could be in the pictures. How she found his jokes hilarious. How he's so sure she winked at him when he was saying goodbye. *I know she's thinking about me. I can just feel it. We're made for each other!* Knox keeps insisting every chance he gets, despite everyone's snickering and shrugging. She's gone and stolen his heart, that's for sure.

Charlie breathes in so sharply that the smoke burns all the way down. He coughs, waiting for the suffocating feeling to pass until he can breathe again. Tears spring to his eyes.

It's stupid because Charlie actually understands. He understands better than others - as far as he knows - what it's like to love a girl. He's had sweethearts during the summer months for years. Girls that he sweet-talked at the fairground, or after mass on a Sunday, or outside of the grocery store. Girls that kissed him behind the ring-toss stall, or in the back of the church hall after service, or in front of the nets at the town school's tennis court. Girls whose pretty faces floated in and out of his mind on the hot summer nights when he couldn't sleep.

Charlie knows what it's like to fall for a girl and think about her every day and night. He really *does* know. But he can't stand this anymore.

Knox is *his* friend. His best friend. Charlie knows Knox better than anybody. He knows his favourite ice-cream flavour (*it's cherry, but only in a wafer cone with chocolate sauce.*). His dream job (*to be a chauffeur, in one of the big cities, so that way he might meet Frank Sinatra one day*). How he spent his twelfth birthday (*He spent it in Welton. The whole year lined up to give him a birthday punch each. Charlie and the others presented him with a desk set, made up of their own desk set materials. Pitts sang happy birthday so loudly that Mr McAllister gave him a*

*demerit.)*

It's stupid, Charlie knows that. Knox isn't *his*. He's allowed to find a girl. He's allowed to spend all his time thinking of her, with that awful dumb grin on his face. It's just, Charlie thinks it out slowly as the burning end of his cigarette starts to creep closer to his fingers, he is so *alone* now. He wants Knox back.

What's so special about Chris anyway? What does she have that he doesn't? Charlie is great, if he dare be so selfish. He makes Knox laugh all the time. He listens to every little thing Knox says. What does Chris know? Nothing. She's setting Knox up, leading him on, going to break his heart. She's not good enough for him. He deserves someone who knows the *real* him. Charlie knows the *real* Knox and-

"Shit!" White heat singes his fingers. The cigarette smoulders against his skin; the filter end is long used up. He throws it down on the floor and stamps it out frantically, "Shit!" He hisses through his teeth, cradling his hand to his chest.

"Charlie?" A voice says incredulously.

*Oh good god help me. What now?*

Charlie grinds his cigarette into the floor with the heel of his shoe just to be sure. Goddamn stupid thing. His fingers are burning like hell.

"What?" He snaps, looking up-

Todd is standing frozen in the doorway, his face struck with quizzical concern. And maybe fear.

"Oh. Todd. I can explain," He starts to come up with an explanation as to why he's swearing and stamping on the floor in a dorm that isn't his own. He must look truly mad. "I didn't want to smoke in *my* dorm because *Cameron's* in there. The view is nicer in here anyway. I was going to leave as soon as you all finished study! I just got sidetracked! And this *bastard* of a cigarette decided to burn right up in my hand." He says it all too fast, too panicked. He's panting. Wait, why is he panting so hard?

"Oh well, I...um..." Todd glances from Charlie's pained face to the cigarette butt peeking out under his shoe, "It's f-fine actually...I was just coming up for an early night, you can stay a little longer if you like..." His eyes are still wide.

Todd is a decent man, but sometimes he can be so blank. He just says things and then goes silent. Luckily for him, Charlie has plenty of experience with silence. Thanks to his father. He knows to either let it stew into something uncomfortable or treat it like it's normal and hope things work out.

"Okay." Charlie agrees, picking the flattened butt up with his good hand and flicking it into the trash can next to one of the desks. Todd comes in and closes the door.

Charlie examines his poor hand. His middle and index fingers are shiny and bright red. Great. Just wonderful. If it wasn't for Knox and Charlie's stupid jealous sulking brain-

"Are you okay, Charlie?" Todd says slowly. He's sitting on his bed, looking gravely worried.

Charlie lets his hand fall to his lap where it curls itself over protectively and stretches his legs out. This window sill is a bit small after all. It feels like he's sitting on a children's bed. "I'm just keen, Todd. Just peachy keen." It comes out a lot more defeated than he hoped.

"Do you want me to get some bandages? Or a nurse? For um..." Todd nods at his hand. *Probably should*, Charlie thinks. Then again, he's dealt with worse before on his own.

"I'm alright, Todd." He says with all the confidence he can muster. He almost convinces himself too.

"So, how was study group? Did I miss much?" Charlie presses on, eager to move away from the subject of his throbbing hand.

"It was fine. I still don't understand any of those latin conjugations." Todd shakes his head. He wrings his hands nervously. He does that a lot.

"Maybe Neil can help you out later. He seems to understand everything these days." Charlie offers. Todd laughs a soft *maybe*. All the same, his eyes light up at the mention of Neil.

The two of them seem to be close. Todd and Neil. They're always together between classes, talking and joking quietly between themselves. Maybe that's just the perks of sharing a dorm with

someone you can get along with. Maybe Todd and Neil are just good friends...the same way he and Knox are good friends.

"You mind if I smoke another one?" Charlie says, reaching into his pocket for another cigarette with his good hand. Todd shakes his head.

"I can do that...if you want-" Todd reaches for the lighter which Charlie is struggling to work and lights his cigarette for him. Charlie clumsily holds it in his left hand. It feels wrong. But it's his own fault.

"Thanks Todd."

Todd just smiles nervously and shrugs, "You mind if I work on some history? I can go somewhere else you want to be alone-" Then he laughs at the face Charlie pulls as he shakes his head. Charlie doesn't mind Todd sticking around. It'll be quiet. And besides, this is technically Todd's dorm after all.

They both sit - Charlie curled up on the window sill and Todd hunched over a stack of books. Occasionally the low hiss of a cigarette drag sounds, followed by a slow exhale. Todd dips his pen in the ink well in his desk every few minutes and shakes it off with a light rattle. It's nice and quiet in here. The rain has stopped hammering against the window pane. Bliss.

Charlie's mind circles back to the same old thing that it's been going back to for days- Knox of course. He is tempted to ask what Todd thinks of all this Chris business. *Isn't it awful? Just a waste of a nice gentleman*, he would say and Todd would probably nod because he is agreeable like that. Also, because of course, Charlie *is* right.

When Knox touched his shoulder that night and Charlie was sure he was going to die - that isn't nothing. That's worth more than Chris has ever felt. *He* knew Knox first, has cared about him for years, knows everything about him. Knox is a good man; he's kind and caring and knows how to joke around. He's handsome, not in a godlike marble statue kind of way, but in his own dorky clueless way. Knox *is* the feeling Charlie had in the forest; like he was born anew and could do anything and be anyone. Like *he* was the reason the earth turned and the sun rose every morning. Charlie's heart is a mess just *thinking* about him, what does *Chris* know?

*I loved him first!*

....

Oh god.

The words carve their mark. He doesn't mean it. They came into his head themselves. It's stupid. He's not....he doesn't feel *that* way. No no no. Smoke burns all the way down again, right into his heart.

Charlie puts out his cigarette and it hisses. His hands are *a trembling blotchy mess*. He has to get out of here. *It can't be. It's not like that*. He has to get some air. He has to get out of here.

"Charlie? Where are you going?" He can hear Todd's voice call. It doesn't matter. Blood is rushing so loudly in his ears he might as well be drowning. Charlie is already out the door. Todd won't understand. *No one* will understand. *Why can't he breathe?*

His own dorm is off limits. No way can he go in there and face Cameron. Not like this. And the lounge is full of everyone else. His friends... and Knox, of all people. *I loved him first!*

Cameron's feet carry him down the stairs and through the halls. It's raining outside again, lashing down like the first wave of a god's unbridled anger. It's so cold and so dark. Charlie doesn't care.

*Knox can do so much better.*

He doesn't know where he's going. His feet just won't stop carrying him, all the way out past the courtyard and to the edge of the forest. He needs to get away from here.

*What's so great about Chris? What does she have that I don't?*

Charlie's vision is a blur of nothing and everything. *Don't cry, stupid.*

*Knox is his friend. We're just friends.*

He manages a stuttered breath. His head is going to explode soon. Another short breath. Then another one. *Come on Charlie. Pull it together.*

Knox's hand on his shoulder, firm and steady, like he really cares. His eyes were huge and bright and wonderful. The way it made Charlie feel - like he was alive. Like electricity had sparked through him and made his heart go crazy. How he wanted Knox to stay there like that. To just hold onto him. He's sturdy and caring and god is he *stupid*

sometimes. But the truth is eating Charlie up now. Now that he knows it, he can't pretend he doesn't.

*I'm in love with him.*

*I'm in love with my best friend.*

Charlie is a dripping mess. Shit. He is shivering now and stung by something. Fear. Jealousy. Both.

*I'm in love with him.*

It's getting cold and he can't stay out here forever.

September 23rd 1959

Diary,

I burnt my hand so this is going to be messy. I'm still dripping wet from the rain anyway. I'm in a state.

I'm in love with Knox. I had another episode today. Like the one I had in the summer before...when I can't breathe and everything just gets too loud. I have feelings for Knox. I don't understand what's happening to me. I'm not like that! I like girls, I always have. Remember Judy? She kissed me at the creek, under the bridge. She sent me letters for weeks. I shared my coat with her. I *loved* her.

I don't know what to do. How can I face everyone tomorrow? And look them in the eyes like nothing has changed. Like I'm not *one of those people*. I like him. What am I going to do about Knox? I can't do anything about it. He's mad about Chris. She's *his* soulmate, he said it himself.

There's nothing for me to do except pretend that I'm not in love with him any different. Or wait until he forgets about Chris which will never happen.

I need to sleep. I'm freezing in these clothes. Cameron is snoring so loud he'll wake up the whole school. He kept asking me where I was... idiot.

Nothing happened. Nothing. I'm not in love with anyone. I'm a dead poet not a perverted romantic. I'm scared.

Yours in suffering,

Charlie

## Chapter End Notes

Couldn't be me updating another chapter on a whim...

Poor Charlie...'Just friends.'

# Are You A Man Or An Amoeba?

## Chapter Notes

(As per the tags there is some internalised and some period typical homophobia in this chapter, as well as brief use of the q slur.)

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

September 25th 1959

"Knees up Hopkins! Push harder!" Nolan barks into his megaphone.

Charlie is at rowing practise. It's going pretty well, except for the fact that the burn on his right hand is blistered and is stinging like hellfire right now, even after two days. Or maybe he's just impatient. Either way it's distracting.

Worst of all, Cameron is behind him. Nothing like having that moron breathing down his neck to make a man feel mad.

"Up to full pressure in three strokes!" Nolan is barking.

His friends are off doing who knows what. Meeks and Pitts might have cracked their radio by now. They're probably dancing to *Twist and Shout* and having a blast.

"*Three...*"

Neil and Todd will be practising lines for Neil's big play in December. Charlie doesn't think he's ever seen Neil so excited about anything like he is about that play before.

"*...two...*"

And Knox? A pang of pain and guilt and twisting shame hits Charlie squarely in the heart. Maybe then it will stop beating completely, stuffed full of terrible, awful love. It would be a relief if it did.

"*One! All in!*"

...Knox is going on a little bicycle ride. He told Charlie this morning, quietly, like it was their secret. (Knox seems to confide in Charlie a lot when it comes to Chris - since Charlie is meant to know about all this

kind of thing: girls and guys, romance and heartache. Now he knows it much *too* well.)

Knox is going to find Chris and tell her how he feels down deep inside. Her school isn't far from here. She has a cheer routine ready for a big game. Knox is probably there right now with her in his arms, having confessed his undying love. She probably is stunned but delighted. She probably agreed to being his girl immediately-

"*Dalton! Tighten up!*" Nolan barks into his megaphone.

Charlie frowns and tries to snap out of it. His hand burns faintly. It's his own fault so he can't exactly complain.

"*Sloppy form, Dalton! Focus!*"

Charlie scowls so hard he can feel his forehead become lined. *Now I look like Father*, he thinks. Anything but that. God anything but that. It just makes him row harder.

\*

"Hey! Dalton! Watch it!" Cameron cries, aghast. Bread crumbs fall from the sky. Maybe *Cameron* should be the one taking up acting. He has a loud enough voice. No one would need to even go to the theatre - you'd be able to hear him on the street.

They're walking back across the grounds to the school. This morning Charlie had pocketed a slice of toast from the breakfast table and to his own great enjoyment, now he is tossing the crumbs with a smirk...being generous when it comes to Cameron's hair. The look of resignation on Cameron's face is worth it alone.

"What was that out there today? You were a mess! You're not even a good team player! We'd be better off with one of seventh graders instead of you!" Cameron's spittle flies in the air like a neat water trick.

Charlie can't even bring himself to feel hurt. "Why are you so upset Cameron? Cause Nolan didn't notice you trying to kiss his moldy shoes again?"

"Eat shit, Dalton."

"What? So I can look like you?"

It's the most Charlie has laughed in days.

He forgot how good it feels.

September 26th 1959

Dear Diary,

So Knox's visit to see Chris didn't work. Chet Danbury was there. Knox says Chris didn't even notice him. He's pretty torn up about the whole thing. He barely talks anymore, only to feel sorry for himself. I even tried a few jokes at dinner tonight and he didn't budge. Even all of Keating's jokes just passed him by.

I feel sorry for him. Just a little bit. His blank stare is starting to irk me. The man is completely morose. It's like he has lost a part of himself. I could drop dead in front of him and he wouldn't even notice.

But at the same time I think I'm secretly too pleased. Chris is Chet Danbury's girl. That's got to stand for something. Knox doesn't have a chance. I'm being selfish, amn't I? I'm being so selfish. But I want him for myself. Why does it have to be Knox? Why not some smart girl across in Henley Hall instead of him?

Just to be clear, no one has noticed a thing. About...what's going on. Hiding is every bit as simple and dreadful as I thought. Every minute I'm prepared to burst into flames. I'm carrying around whatever these feelings are and I'm waiting for them to spill out of me. And then what? I'll get kicked out of here. Or worse: Knox will hate me.

It's better to act like nothing is going on. I'm too tied down trying to cheer Old Romeo up that no one suspects any different. It's been working pretty orderly. It's like I never realized my feelings in the first place...who am I kidding? Even when I'm not thinking about it, I'm thinking about it. In chemistry class or history or trig or latin or even english (which I hate because I want to pay attention to Keating! His classes are one of the best parts about being here and I can't even concentrate!) And when I'm at study group or at the dinner table or lying in bed at night. He's all I can see, all I think about. I'm trying not to. I'm trying to not spend too long staring into his stupidly wonderful face or giving him a nudge when he blanks out to drool over Chris. I'm trying to just move on and keep my heart out of it but Knox is in the

way. *He's in the damn way.*

The worst part is that none of this matters. It doesn't make a difference if I love him or not, if he knows or not. I'm not meant to love him, right? I feel like I've done something terrible, like robbed a bank or swallowed too many of Mother's sleeping pills or dug my own grave in the cold Vermont soil. I don't want to feel like this is wrong.

How many times do I have to think about this? How loving him shouldn't feel so right? Like it's meant to be this way? Father always said: "it is the queers and the communists, they're the downfall of this country! They're godless immoral people. Perverts who prey on others. They need to be snuffed out. They're a poison to the people!" ...Then why is loving Knox so easy? I'm not evil. I'm not trying to hurt him. I love him down to my soul. It's just love - it just happened. I didn't do anything to deserve this. It's not fair to feel like I'm wrong, like I'm walking with a target on my back. Like I should be prepared to pay for giving my heart away. Sometimes I think I ought to be more ashamed of what I am now. I'm just terrified of anyone finding out.

Sometimes I lie in my bed at night and stare at the ceiling until the sun comes up. How many men have shared this bed, this room before me? I can't be alone. There has to be other people out there. Other people like me. They do exist, somewhere far away, under as many lies and secrets as me. Do they live happily? Is that even possible? Or is this all I am now, trapped forever? In another time, when I'm long gone, maybe someone will remember me. Remember what I was and what I am. What I could be. Remember what it's like to long to be held and told you're enough for loving and living. Remember the horrible, dreadful, blessed, beautiful curse that is loving Knox Overstreet.

I'm sounding ridiculous now. I've been up far too long and my eyes are half closing.

I need to be careful with this diary. Every night I slip it in between the sheets of my bed where no one will look for it but maybe I need a new place to put it. God, if anyone reads this I'm out. I'll be done for. Both in Welton and home. Mother and Father will never take me back. My friends will never talk to me again. Knox will hate me. I won't be able to live with myself.

I just want to be daring and make my life extraordinary, like Keating is always telling us to do. That's all I want.

Yours,  
Charlie

PS: Todd and Neil were practising Neil's lines today. They're really good friends. I'm happy for them, if not a little envious. I want to tell them everything but I know they wouldn't understand. I'm being foolish, wishing that they're like me. That they're the same as I am. That's just selfish on my part.

\*

October 1st 1959

"Okay so you're Chris."

"Really? I'm not being-"

"Come on Charlie! Help me out!"

Knox, it turns out, is truly a desperate man. They're walking around the soccer field, just the two of them. Classes are out for the day. It's almost dark out.

"Fine. Just this once. Just for you."

The grateful smile Charlie gets makes him want to die.

"Okay, so if I'm going to tell Chris...well, you, and I say, Chris I really like you."

*Christ, can they just get this over before Charlie breaks*

"Okay. And now what?"

"Well, Charlie, you're meant to *be* Chris. What would she say?"

He could do it right now. End it. Tell Knox that Chris will never love him, that it's futile and foolish to hope.

It is tempting.

'Oh, Knox! What a surprise!' He puts on a soft voice. Who knows what Chris sounds like? This is all Charlie has the patience for. "Well I'm not sure I feel the same way about about you, Knoxious." His voice drips with false anguish. Or maybe it's real.

"What? Come on, Charlie! Can you at least *try*?"

Charlie grinds to a halt, his feet stuck to the shorn grass, and it takes everything he has not to let it all out. He's crawling with a sluggish trepidation, like he *should* be doing something. Like he should be crying to the heavens about how he is in love with the biggest dunderhead to walk the planet and who doesn't even realise it-

"I'm in love with her, Charlie. I just want a little practise." Knox's voice is quiet. Cautious, even.

"You're my best friend and...well, if you don't want to listen to me that's fine, I'm sure Pitts or Meeks could help. I just want to impress her, you know?" The worst part is Knox means it. Not in a cruel way either. He's sincere. Classic Knox, ever patient and well meaning. Even if he is going mad over Chris, he's still the overly soft and sweet Knox that he always has been.

Too soft and sweet for Welton that is. Charlie wouldn't have him any other way.

He digs his heels into the grass a little, his hands deep in his pockets. A sigh.

"Fine. I'll do it."

Even if it kills him. The thought of making Knox happy is one that outshines being the person to break his heart...for now at least.

"You will? Thanks Charlie!" Knox's smile is like putting salt to a wound. Or stabbing himself with a pencil one hundred times.

Charlie smiles. It's brittle. *Do it for him.*

They walk rounds of the soccer field and say their respective lines (more like what Knox wants to hear) until the sun has fallen from the sky.

"Don't worry Charlie," Knox elbows him as they walk up the stairs to the dorms, "You'll find a girl soon! You just have to wait for the right moment! I know there's got to be dozens out there for you, you're a real ladies man." A soft laugh and a wink. Another elbow nudge. Every touch is like being struck down by lightning, by the gods themselves.

Knox retires to his room with a cheerful "goodnight" and a "thank you."

*I don't even deserve it.*

Charlie is left alone in the hallway.

He doesn't go into his dorm until Dr Hager tells him off for loitering.

He doesn't fall asleep until the sun comes back up.

\*

October 5th 1959

Dear Diary,

How about I make a list of things I can do with my feelings?

- Ignore them forever and hope I forget about them...which has not worked this far
- Throw them to the bottom of the rowing lake
- Tell him
- Smoke them out of me...might not work I need to save up on cigarettes...maybe I could trade Hopkins my english assignment for some more?
- Just tell him
- Burn them
- Drop them off the chapel roof
- Tell him

You know what? This isn't working. I'm going to bed. And Cameron's snoring again, just my lucky day.

From Charlie...with despair.

## Chapter End Notes

Poor Charlie...the pining is real.

For anyone that actually does rowing competitively my apologies if the coxswain is inaccurate, research can only get you so far lol.

Charlie's father's (awful) remarks stem mainly from the prevalence of the Lavender Scare in the early to mid 50's. (If you're here from my other DPS fic...yes I talk about this any chance I get) The biggest product of that moral panic was the conflating of any lgbt+ person with communism and spies which was a very big deal given all the goings on with the Cold War. I'll be linking more reading on the Lavender scare in the appendix of

this fic when we get to it!

Hope you enjoyed!

:)

# What Is The Point?

## Chapter Notes

Sorry for being a little late with the update, I somehow managed to completely forget about the concept of time and responsibility.

Here's some pinning, a treat for my dear readers!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

October 21st 1959

Another day, another DPS meeting.

And another opportunity for Charlie to flaunt his guarded affections under the guise of friendship.

*I loved him first!*

It is true. He can't deny himself that - there is a Knox Overstreet shaped hole in his heart that is waiting to be filled. That will have to keep waiting to be filled forever.

Life wasn't always this... tragically yearning. It wasn't always flowing with the shallow pains of a heartache that shouldn't really exist; one that lives under his very skin like a sweetly disguised poison or maybe even an unrealized antidote. He has been in love for almost a month now, spent days and nights and every waking moment with his mind running in fruitless, longing circles. The love has grown its vines long and twisting through his whole soul and made him wish he had never realised his feelings. And yet, he can't imagine *not* loving Knox.

Poor Schmuck, he thinks of himself, of all things this is how I've ended up. In a shabby cave with my friends, wearing a stupid beret and in love with a boy. It's the kind of scandalous thing his father would read about in the papers. The kind of thing that would make him sigh and shake his head with thin-lipped disgust. The image makes Charlie's blood quicken. For a moment, a disgruntled wave of fear grips him but he shakes it off. Screw that - what does his father know about love?

He has finished playing his soul into his saxophone and vaguely wishing his hands weren't so clammy so that they wouldn't stick to the keys. Nervous as he might be, the music flows out of him and the sound is like an extension of his being. It's second nature to him, like

Neil and his acting or Meeks and almost any subject. In all honesty, it doesn't sound half bad. The others seem to agree - in the form of a hushed awe that's swept over the cave like a fall breeze.

"My parents made me take the clarinet for years. I *hated* it," He puffs his pipe, eyebrows raised.

Somewhere memories surface of hours trying to perfect his playing only to be shut down, of the weight with which expectation introduced itself. His mother tried to encourage him even if his father said the clarinet was one of the worst sounds on God's great earth. He said why should Charlie even try if he knows it will amount to nothing? That same week Charlie stopped going to lessons. Classic causation.

"The saxophone is more..." Charlie searches for the right word as he illustratously waves a hand, "sonorous."

It earns him a few laughs. A few mocking drawls of "vocabulary!" His friends chortle and nudge each other, eyebrows raised in feigned surprise. They are as familiar to him as they ever were, a constant comfort to have friends like these. He could be truly content here like this, with just his friends around him, if only he weren't so *unlucky*-

It hadn't worked. He knew that it wouldn't. The saxophone, sonorous as it is, can't do the impossible. Does that mean he should give up? If Knox could even pay him notice for five seconds, this would have been worth it...

Charlie wonders if he can do this forever. Keep winding himself back up like a toy, pop a few laughs and wait for Knox to notice him. If forever is what it takes, so be it.

He will run out of jokes soon, won't he? They aren't infinite. The sea may be wide but his boat is ever so small. He has made it this far in life, coasting on laughs and quips at the right moments but it seems useless now. Some things just aren't going to go his way. Not unless he finds the miraculous good luck to make Knox fall in love with him and not get kicked out of Welton for it.

*I wish I were a bird*, He tries his hardest to think like a poet would, full of love and armed with the right words. Words that would make women swoon and gods be reborn, *Knox could keep me in his room and every morning I would sing him a song.*

Hm. Amateur. Not really as poetic as he had hoped.

\*

*Just tell him.*

Dust clouds in the air as they all scramble to their feet. It stings his eyes a little.

Knox has taken off.

"Where are you going?"

*"I'm calling her!"*

Charlie's mouth fills with bitter jealousy. He thought he might be used to the taste by now. No matter how much it floods him, he can't dampen it and take no notice. It's like eating his own heart out.

*If it takes forever, so be it.*

\*

The dead poets all stand around the phone booth. The off limits phone booth that no one is allowed use. The one his mother could never bring herself to ring up. From his friends, there is nervous shuffling and faint laughter, it's all bright eyes and enlivened faces that surround him. They're really being daring now, aren't they? This is what it is to break the limits of the honour code here in Welton, right? If this all it takes, Charlie thinks, he could have been the most unruly hellraiser a long time ago. God knows that he would do anything now - honour code be damned - if it meant Knox would pay him mind and turn to look at him, his beaming face would be like an effervescent sun. Charlie could die happy then, blessed by the soft light of being acknowledged, *maybe even loved-*

Knox is dialling numbers with a disappointing determination etched onto his face. *Dammit.*

Charlie wishes he could witness this as someone else. Contemplate this story but not be a part of it. Love a boy who wasn't already blinded by

the idea of someone else.

That way it wouldn't hurt so much.

"Hello, Chris? This is Knox Overstreet."

*God he's going to kill me.*

Charlie is leaning in the booth doorway now. In the moment, he's not even trying to hide. He stares and stares into Knox's face helplessly. *Why can't you just notice me? I'm right here.* He can hear Chris' sweet voice on the other end of the line. Not to be dramatic, but it makes him want to tear his ears off.

"She's glad I called!" Knox whispers to the others excitedly. His eyes are shining, wild and full of hope.

*His stupid smile, Charlie can't help himself, I want him.*

"Would I like to come to a party?" Knox repeats into the receiver, his voice incredulous.

Oh no. Is this really how it's going to go? After all this waiting and hoping? Every sleepless night with nothing but his sordid thoughts for company has led to this. Every hasty diary entry and even hastier hiding of said diary has led to this. Every glance and grin, every accidental touch that feels like he's been struck by lightning and damning stop of his heart when they share the same room even. After all the signs for Knox to *not* get involved-

"Sure! I'll be there Chris," Knox is saying, "Friday night at the Danburys. Great! I'll see you there! Thank you."

So this is how it's going to go.

Charlie could scream. Or curl up in a ball forever. He isn't fussy about which one.

Knox lets out a mighty *yawp!* He's going to see her again...a feat in it's own right. He has to admire him for his dedication to the cause. It seems Knox's desperation is paying off...unfortunately.

"Can you believe it? She was gonna call me! She invited me to a party with her!" Knox is starstruck.

Charlie actually *can't* believe it. He never thought Chris would remember who Knox was, nevermind want to invite him to a *party*. Charlie and Chris. They have one thing in common at least. And the one thing is Knox. Even if one of them is more acquainted to that subject than the other. Charlie's prospects are looking worse and worse.

"-At Chet Danbury's house." Charlie notes. A washed out glimmer of hope rises in his chest but he doesn't let it live long. There's no talking Knox out of it. Things are set in motion and there's no stopping him. The party could be at the gates of Hell and he would still go if only to see Chris.

"Yeah." Knox is a lost cause isn't he?

"Well?"

Charlie can lie to himself all he wants, that he is trying to move on and that it's Knox who is getting in the way of that but he knows it's only a temporary salve. He doesn't want to move on. He just wants to be loved for crying out loud.

"So?"

"So you really think she means you're going with her?" Charlie tries to keep his voice steady and not completely incredulous. Frustration is boiling under his skin like hot oil. *She doesn't love you! It's me, you idiot! I'm the one who is in love with you! She doesn't give a damn about you!*

Knox suddenly looks serious, "Well no, Charlie but that's not the point! That's not the point at all."

Well if that's the case-

"What is the point?"

He's feeling more stupid by the second in his dumb beret that got passed to him in the cave. The wretched saxophone is getting half strangled in his hands. Hope is fading in his chest like a dying bird.

Knox's eyes are too round and dark for Charlie to bear. They're too full of wonder and hope, it's like staring into the swirling stars in the night sky when you're really looking for a distant planet. He can look all he likes but he isn't going to see what he wants to see. There will be no adoration mirrored back at him.

The two of them are practically sharing the same air in the phone booth. If Charlie tries hard enough he can taste the fervour and excitement, but it's faint and it fizzles and clots into something thick and bloated. The distance between them is altogether both too wide and too short for comfort.

"The point is, Charlie, she was thinking about me! I've only met her once and she was thinking about me! It's gonna happen! She's gonna be mine, I can feel it!"

Knox turns out of the phone booth with a breezy smile. His head is in the clouds...or in space. Wherever it is, it's unreachable now and probably will be for evermore.

*She was thinking about me!*

Touché, Romeo.

Knox walks out and up, out of sight.

The other dead poets share a smirk among themselves. They find the whole Chris situation entertaining over anything else. What Charlie would give to share in that. His own arm. Every cigarette in Vermont. Every breath in his lungs for a life without longing.

He forces himself not to frown and by some miracle, manages to turn his face into something that might look mildly bemused. Possibly even a small smirk if he is lucky.

Charlie is burning, from head to toe. He is going to burst into flames, like an unholy devil and turn to ashes on the spot. It's lucky the saxophone hasn't crumpled under the force of his clenched hands.

*What is the point?*

He can't let himself cry. Not now.

It's the beginning of the end isn't it? The end of his thinly spread hope that Knox would forget about Chris and magically love him instead. This is how it's going to be. Knox is going to flaunt his oblivious love and Charlie will be able to do nothing but watch and want. It quite literally hurts.

There's a joyous *whoop* from up ahead where Knox is.

His friends laugh and follow down the halls, jostling and cheering as they go. Oh the boyish revelry of youth, eh?

Charlie has to follow. He has no other choice.

He is trying his hardest to keep his desperation below the line. To not do anything drastic. The water is rising and he is alone. An explosion is drawing nearer.

What's that quote Keating had said once? One of his Marlon Brando impressions-

*Tempt not a desperate man.*

Charlie had thought it was Knox who was the desperate one, with his never ending pining and swooning. With his bicycle rides to town every weekend in the hope of catching a glimpse of Chris. But now it's paying off for him. It's Charlie who is the truly desperate man and God knows he is being tempted.

But he can't afford to mess around. Not if he wants to stay at Welton. What would he do if he got expelled? There would be no future for him. Not if he wants to keep his friends and be there for Keating's classes and smoke pipes in a seedy cave. Those things are the best part of his days, the only things that make him get out of his bed in the mornings. That's only a small part of it. His parents would disown him, banish him to hell, never speak of him again. He would disappear from every record of existence like he was never there, like a flame in the winter wind. His father would make sure Charlie knew just how much of a disappointment he is to the family if he didn't kill him first. There is nothing for him if he gets expelled from Welton. Nothing.

Charlie takes a deep breath and starts after the others. He shoves his hands deeper and deeper into his pockets to stop them shaking. Tears threaten to spill out.

The burn scars on his right hand flare. God, he could use a cigarette right now. Or ten. Twenty. He could choke on them, put everyone out of their misery, burn up in a pile of smoke and ash.

He can't throw it all away...yet.

*If it takes forever, so be it.*

Chapter End Notes

\*sigh\*

Unrequited love is a hell of its own...but boy, the party! The desire to act out! Things are heating up!

(My apologies for the lack of actual diary in this update but sometimes pov is too tempting. There'll be more diary in the next chapters, I promise!)

:)

# Oh Me! Oh Life!

## Chapter Notes

It's update time!

A heads up: This chapter includes some internalised homophobia/biphobia (as ever), general yearning and implied sexual content towards the end of the chapter! (I promise it's nothing graphic)

We're also briefly intersecting with minor events in my other fic *Midnight Feast*, woohoo.

Enjoy and thank you so much for all of your support!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

October 22nd 1959

Dear Diary,

I have a lot to say and not a lot of time to say it, because Cameron is being a dunce as usual - he wants to turn out the lights and sleep early. Can't he see that I'm busy? He's starting to glare at me from his desk so I'll have to write this quickly.

It turns out that I am no longer alone. Todd is like I am! I'm not the only one! I didn't mean to tell him about Knox, but it spilled out of me like a waterfall over cold stones when we were at study group tonight. Maybe I always knew Todd was different too but I think it's simpler to say that with hindsight...can you really tell if a man is one of us by just looking at him? When I told him about Knox I was seized by a sort of vengeful terror and I was prepared to take it back, to say I'm not a queer, what are you talking about? I was ready to turn the words into weapons, for a moment I considered using the way he looks at Neil as a step into my own security. Blackmail. One man's secret is another man's bargaining tool after all.

Now I just feel guilty for even thinking of it. I was so close to being a stinking turncoat at the smallest threat. I was going to tell the biggest lie of all lies to save my own skin and for what? Todd wasn't even going to turn on me. He feels about Neil the same way I feel about Knox. The speed with which I was prepared to jump ship is what worries me. I'm not Cameron. I'm not a rat that will run to Nolan at every chance I get. I'm not. I can't be, can I?

Todd is good. He seems to understand what it's like to be like this. To feel so right about being wrong. I used to think he was plain and boring but he has a caring heart under it all. He looks at Neil like a flower bud turning to the sun, like he needs him to even survive around here. Todd agrees that there's nothing wrong with being like this, with liking another boy. Or maybe that's just my own mind trying to reassure me that it is. I've spent long enough debating it in my head to dwell on any other possibility.

He asked me not to tell anyone about him and his feelings for Neil. Then I really felt awful about being ready to use it against him before because he looked frightened. He was pleading and I hate the idea of him suffering for that now. I need Todd. I need the knowledge that I'm not alone. We can at least keep each other's secrets now. I can tempt myself into a mutual friendship, can't I? We need one another's comforting lies to last around here. We need each other's tall tales of a whole future because where else will we find it?

Oh, I was only able to say all of this because Knox was at the Danbury's again. They wanted to have him over for dinner before they go out of town for a few days...and Chet Danbury throws his stupid party in five days.

Cameron is starting to mutter under his breath now. The boy is gone mad, I swear sometimes I'm surprised I haven't been killed in my sleep. Who needs sleep anyway? What's the big deal? I'd better go.

Signing off,  
Charlie

\*

October 24th 1959

Dear Diary,

The party is in three more days. That might have something to do with how restless I feel, like I'm just letting life pass me by. What's the use of going to DPS meetings and talking about living freely if I don't mean what I say? What am I then if not just a hypocrite and a liar? I'm going to have to do something daring or else I'll go mad. Why not seize the day while I still can? Then everyone will know what a lie this is, to live the same day over and over, when we could be using our minds and our hearts for some good.

The elements of disbelief are overpowering in the morning hours. I'm delirious again. I need a dry slice of toast and a measly apple and then I'll leave all this restlessness behind me. Writing this early in the morning makes me think stupid thoughts.

I feel like Knox is slipping further and further from me. It's selfish as always but it is only the truth. I miss him more than anything. I don't want to share him with Chris or anyone else. I'm being selfish as ever. If I could gather up all the memories of him, all the little details and dreams he's told me, all the good bits and the bad bits, every single goofy joke he's made, every twinkle in his eyes or his tired way of messing up my hair and piece them all together. Like a jigsaw. Sure, it would be clumsy and not really the whole of him but at least maybe then it would love me back.

My stomach won't stop crying out for breakfast. I had better go. I know that I'm being dramatic but can't a man dream for once? I must come up with something soon to look forward to because hell, Knox is a dead end at this point

From, Charlie.

27th October, 1959

Charlie is in Knox's dorm room, sitting on his bed with his arms crossed. He looks around and dutifully observes, as any good friend would; the stash of foil-wrapped chocolate sitting on Knox's study desk for future DPS meetings, the year 1943 scratched crudely into the side of the bed frame that's gone smooth with time, the space between the floorboards where the pin-up centrefold pages are kept discreetly...*a man has got to relieve himself somehow*, Charlie thinks. And then tries not to think about *that* statement too much - about the specifics, the warmth of skin and ceaseless speed of touch and stuttered breaths...he can dwell on it later in private. It's the kind of thing you think about when you want to be a lot more than friends, isn't it? Not something he should be thinking about right now. He pushes those thoughts to the back of his mind for another time.

All of Charlie's observances aren't new. He knows Knox's side of this dorm as well as he knows his own. What's new to him is Knox himself. Charlie has never seen him this anxious. He is pacing up and down between the beds like he's trying to wear a groove in the floor. Charlie watches him loosen and tighten his tie over and over with frantic hands, his mouth set tight in a worried frown. The sound of steps

going back and forth and back and forth from the closed door to the window is starting to grate on him a little. It's making *him* feel nervous now.

"Knoxious?" *Keep it light, Charlie. Don't sound too worried or you'll give yourself the slip.*

"Yes, Charlie?"

"Why'd you call me in here?" *(-you called me quietly, privately, when you could have asked for Meeks or Neil or Pitts. For what? You're getting my hopes up, you know that right? I've been sitting here for five minutes and you haven't said anything and now I'm wondering what's going on-)*

Knox stops in front of him, his brow creasing a little in a way that makes Charlie want to smooth it out with a quick joke...or a tender touch of his hand. Knox is *never* nervous like this, even for exams - that's usually Todd's job, right? Knox is always the calm one who gives everyone a clap on the back and encouraging words if they need it. He really looks like he could use that now.

"Well?" Knox spiffs his hair to one side, looking at his reflection in the window, "Do I look alright? For the party, I mean. Is this too much?" He gestures at the clothes he is wearing which happens to be his school shirt and trousers. It's a smart look...if he was going to a meeting with some of his father's connections in the banking world. Not the kind of outfit you would wear to a party. But that can't be said out loud.

*So this is what he called me in here for.*

Charlie laughs and he isn't entirely sure why. He can't help it, it just comes out in a short splutter. God, his heart is getting heavier by the minute - he could use a laugh or two.

"First things first," Charlie stands up (and notes how there is little room for the two of them) and dares to step forward, "You're not going to impress anyone with *that* tie."

What Charlie really wants to say is: *you know you look perfect to me. You could wear whatever you want and I would still think that you're the best thing this side of Vermont. Whatever you do, it's all good by me.*

He keeps his mouth shut and busies himself with fixing Knox's tie. The heat coming from inside Knox's collar is like standing next to the sun. Or is he just imagining it? He fixes the tie, looping it correctly and

focusing on the gentle rustle sound it makes and how close they're standing together. The steady roundness of Knox's jaw and how it might feel, real and firm and precious, if Charlie could hold a hand to it. How the skin would glow just under the press of his fingertips and how he would be as gentle and loving as could be. How they're sharing the same breaths and how those big brown eyes staring into his face are going to melt it and how the lips almost on par with his own are slightly parted and they look too soft and sweet and unbearably good to be true...

"That's a small improvement," Charlie says, stepping backwards too quickly and half falling over the bed behind him, his cheeks feel like they might be growing ruby red in colour, but he tries to play it down "Chris will like your tie much better now." Thankfully the words come out as a playful jab. He even delivers it with a smirk. Perfect performance.

Knox sighs and rolls his eyes, "I'm hoping Chris cares about me more than just my *tie*, Charlie-"

"Come on Knoxious, let's just call a sparrow a sparrow, you have to look good to impress her-"

Another exasperated sigh. How much of a burden must Charlie be on this sweet love? Too much of one, he thinks.

"That isn't even how the saying goes! Besides, Chris and I are meant to be together-"

"-then why did you invite me in here to ask if you look alright? Why ask if you know she already loves you so much?" It's flat. Heavy like a wet bag of sand and tired, of being an afterthought, of having to stand by and watch everything unfold without him.

Charlie can picture it: Knox turning up at the party, almost red with the effort of cycling to get there fast and in his Welton issue shirt, tie and trousers with his shoelaces double-knotted as always. The fall air will be cold. He isn't going to fit in there. No one will want to hang out with the guy who goes to the rich kid school across the town, who is going to be a banker because his father wants him to be one. The one kid who writes poetry for a girl who is practically engaged. She won't pay him any attention the whole night because she doesn't really love him. He's going to stick out terribly, a real heartbroken disappointed eye-sore. Charlie can't help but feel a little sorry for him.

"Sorry, Charlie. You're right. I asked you in here to help me...you're

good at that kind of thing, you know? Girls and parties and that kind of thing. I'm just getting all worked up over nothing." Knox's voice is low and sober. He looks like he really means it. Those eyes. Those hands. That boy.

*No, it isn't your fault Knox. You are a mess but a desperate, beautiful mess. You don't have repent for asking me to come into your dorm. I should be the one apologizing. I shouldn't have hoped that you were going to say that you know how I feel, that you've known always and now you want me too. That you just want to let your body and heart, soft and close, to love what they love, no matter what anyone thinks about it. That you're tired of wading through the sand and the fog, for time without end, searching for something you can't think to name anymore. What's the use in putting a name to this if it isn't real? I'm the one getting worked up over nothing.*

Charlie puts a hand on Knox's shoulder and squeezes. *(Remember the first DPS meeting? When you put your hand on my shoulder? I haven't slept a night since then. I haven't been what I once was and I'm scared. Did you have to take my heart away with you like that? Do you even care?)*

"It's nothing. Let's forget about it. Carpe diem, right?" He says. Mr Keating would be proud. It takes everything not to lean in for a long embrace, to keep from throwing his arms over Knox's shoulders like a child and holding onto him tightly.

"Carpe diem." Comes the reply, all relief and solemnity and mistaken friendship.

Knox isn't going to be at the DPS meeting tonight. He won't know of Charlie's great plan until tomorrow. A prank. One that Knox will approve of, since it has all the right sentiments involved, things he will agree with. Who would want girls at Welton more than Knox? He's going to love it when he finds out about it tomorrow.

Later, Charlie stands on the grass lawn and raises a hand to wave as Knox rides off to the long-awaited party on his bike. The sun is setting on the horizon. It's almost dark which means it's almost time for his plan to carry through. He watches Knox become a small dot in the distance until he disappears out of sight completely.

The burning of the tie in his hands. The quiet reassurance of Knox's blissful, unaware breathing. The way his head had ducked a little in apology, his brown eyes full of nothing but sincerity. The warmth of

the steady shoulder under his palm.

*It's funny*, Charlie thinks, letting the image of Knox's grateful smile and echo of "Carpe diem" sink down into his soul where he'll keep it safe, *I almost told him I love him*.

If nothing else, the party had better be good. God knows they've both been waiting for it to be over with.

The next time he sees Knox, his plan (small but ambitious for Welton) will be enacted upon and Charlie will either be damned to Hell or adored by all. Either one would be better than the purgatory he's in right now. He wanders back to his dorm and tries to distract himself from the meeting later; another night of poetry and dust and pointless brazen fire in their eyes. The others are at study group again and thankfully that includes Cameron. At least Charlie has some precious time alone, to unpack the thoughts he had put away earlier. *(...it could be more than just heavy petting...longing gasps and flashes of bare skin...vulnerability and tenderness and safety and true love...)* The thoughts you really shouldn't be having about your best friend.

*(...is it possible for two men to even love like that? Charlie supposes that he will never know. Maybe there are some things he will never truly understand, some ways that he will never be held nor touched or cared for - but it can't hurt to imagine them...)*

He has nothing much on his mind but Knox and Knox alone.

## Chapter End Notes

Well, well,

\*rubs hands together\*

If it isn't my good friend pining. Charlie is going to pull some shenanigans and I'm pretty sure we all know how that goes..

Thanks for reading!

:)

# Nuwanda

## Chapter Notes

Hi!

I cannot apologise enough for the lateness of this chapter. I am so so so sorry. Life just got a bit life-y but I'm back! With a long chapter! And enough light pining angst to share!

Content warning are the usual faces as well as: underage drinking, brief descriptions of blood and violence, Charlie being an arrogant little shit and Knox not respecting Chris like he should... because let's face it, Charlie and Knox are far from perfect but this is my fanfic so I get to decide how to incorporate the good, the bad and the ugly...so without further ado:

Hope everyone is staying safe, both physically and emotionally!  
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

27th October 1959

Tonight's meeting is not going well.

"Don't you think they're going to want to know who wrote it? They're going to come for us! Charlie, you had no right to do something like that!"

"The name's *Nuwanda*, Cameron."

...It's not going well at all.

Charlie is surrounded by his friend's glum faces - they may be shadowed in the dark of this stupid, lowly cave but their confusion and dismay is making itself known. There are two girls sitting next to him. He can't remember their names. It's lucky he downed half of the liquor that they passed to him - it means he doesn't have to feel bad about any of this. The lipstick painted crudely on his face is thick and heavy and...is this what it feels like to be an oil painting? Like the one in his father's study - all splendour and solid colour with no real substance? If you tap the smeared canvas too hard the whole thing will cave in. Charlie decides he does feel like a musty oil painting. Something about that is pretty poetic and attractive, he thinks. His mind is speeding through things and it can't stay in one place. He's an

oil painting. Right. Got it. How dashing of him.

Cameron is shaking his head. Next to Charlie, one of the girls' echoes him in vain, "Yeah it's Nuwanda!"

Her hand begins pawing at his arm clumsily and he almost pulls away, because tonight isn't about the girls at all. Not about their pearly smiles or giggles or the soft roundness of their bodies that Charlie thought he would be able to love tonight instead of his best friend. This isn't really about his friends in front of him either, who look so down and disappointed. (The same friends he's known for years, since his first days here when he thought Welton might not be so bad if he could just keep quiet.) The prank tomorrow is more than all of this. It's about challenging authority and seizing what is rightfully his: freedom! Respect! Adoration as fervent as fruit flies to cooling syrup in the summertime! He deserves a little love. Why can't they see that?

"Are we just playing around out here or do we mean what we say?" Smooth. Slick. Words come easy when your blood is swimming with bourbon. But still Charlie doesn't know how to tell them what they can't ever know. He can't talk about how every move he makes isn't something they could hope to understand. He is desperate and it is a surprisingly fierce feeling. It's lonely but he keeps going. It's like burning fuel. You have to stoke the flames every once in a while. You have to put work into to get the results.

He is lonely. It's just a fact. He has his friends and they care about him but they can't give him what he's looking for. They can't hold him and reassure him of the fear that has been in the back of his brilliant mind ever since the first DPS meeting or even before then: Charlie can't be loved back. By anyone. Ever. He can't take it much longer-

Hold on, hold on. He might sound like he's getting out of hand and so what if he is? Blame it on the moonshine. He means every word even if it's just in his head. And he can explain it all, okay? Let's just go back a little, take a second to breathe and things will make more sense. You'll see-

His plan started a week ago after Chris invited Knox to the stupid party. Charlie knew what he had to do: seize the day by pulling something outlandish and daring enough to get him noticed. He lay in bed at night with a new sense of purpose. This is what he was born for. Greatness.

The letter demanding girls be admitted to Welton is something he

came up with easily. It's a clever idea, you can't deny it. Slipping the letter in during proofing? A stirring and shrewd move. Knox will approve of it entirely and doesn't that make it all the more worthwhile? Who wouldn't want a girl to love around these oppressive corridors? Charlie is tremendously proud of himself. He would pat himself on the back if he could reach.

And the phone call from God? Why, Charlie has nothing to declare but his own genius when it comes to that. When tomorrow morning's issue of *Welton Honour* is delivered to every dorm and faculty lodging, chaos will arise and Charlie will be at the forefront of it. The *leader*, if he dare be so cocky. And the phone call from God will be the best way to put his mark on this place. Students will talk of it for generations to come. They'll trade stories of how he so bravely refused to conform, how he opened the doors to better things around here. He'll be a hero. Men and women will swoon. Knox will finally see him for who he really is: someone worthwhile. The phone and briefcase are waiting patiently in his dorm, tucked under the bed. The bicycle bell to make the ringing sound is there too. It all just needs to come together tomorrow when the paper gets released to all those unsuspecting fools.

The girls....well that's a whole other story. He didn't actually mean to pick them up, honestly, he didn't. He had been minding his own business and talking a brisk walk around the grounds before the meeting, preparing himself for the big reveal to the others, when he spotted them along the fence beside the soccer field. Girls! And not just any girls, townies as Pitts would say. They aren't from Henley Hall. They probably don't even go to school. They were interested about the school and Charlie is so smooth, how could he not let them join in on the fun? The guys would be impressed he had picked up some chicks. He did love women as much as he loved Knox see? And they shared their liquor with him which was an added bonus. They had giggled and stumbled their way here and they made Charlie feel arrogant. Look at how good he is with the ladies! If only Knox was here he would be jealous and rightly so because Charlie may be a mess but he is a hot, charming mess and he doesn't even have to try. He can have whoever he wants. He doesn't have to go write them a stupid poem or follow them around even if they're already half way to being engaged - Charlie is too good for that. He can have his cake *and* eat it too. Knox *wishes* he were Charlie (...wishes he was *with* Charlie, if he had any common sense) He doesn't know what he's missing out on...

What's that? Oh? The name Nuwanda? Just a little something Charlie

came up with to impress the ladies *and* the men. It's mysterious and new and if it isn't wickedly impressive. He can reinvent himself with this name. He can do and say whatever he likes as Charlie, but as Nuwanda? He can do and say whatever he likes *and* he doesn't have to answer for it. He can love whom his heart chooses and shield himself from the fallout at the same time. Charlie is the one who has fallen head over heels. Nuwanda is just a stand-in. A good one at that. Charlie is his own backup. Smart, right?

"If they catch me, I'll tell them I made it up."

He says it with casual confidence. There will be ways to get out of trouble. There always is. Like he said before, this is bigger than them all. It's about seizing what is rightfully his and his alone. No one else needs to worry. It's Charlie's glory and he gets to choose who he shares it with. Don't try and take it from him before he's even got it - that's just being greedy. Not one of the faces surrounding him has changed. They stay a damning mix of stunned and hurt, flickering in and out of the moonlight. He shrugs it off. Tough crowd.

Time to change the direction. He can't afford to ride on the tailcoats of their disapproval. What do his friends know about living? He may as well make a night of it while he still can.

"Hey, uh.." Charlie turns to the girl on his left. What's her name again? Her eyes are round and pale. Nothing but two blue saucers staring him in the face. Christ. "Gloria, sweetheart. You want to hear something?"

"Uh huh." She nods like one of those porcelain dolls in frilly bibs that Mother keeps in the pantry, except much more life like. She's pretty, Charlie supposes. Her hand has snuck up his arm and sits squeezing just above his elbow. She's grinning in earnest and Charlie waits for his heart to skip a beat. For attraction to blossom and flower. If he wasn't here at Welton he could date someone like her. Bring her to get milkshakes. Sneak into the pictures for the midnight Calamity Jane reruns. Meet her parents. Get married and own a little house with a white picket fence, two kids and a dog. Isn't that how it's supposed to go?

Gloria clasps his arm and Tina bats her eyes at him. Charlie feels absolutely nothing. Huh.

"Who wants to hear some poetry? I wrote it myself!"

Cameron groans in protest. Charlie will take that as a vote of

confidence. If Knox were here, he would probably clap.

So he recites poetry for the girls. They're all from his textbooks of course, every line is stolen away from Byron or Shakespeare but the girls don't need to know that. They seem impressed. It's a shame that can't be said for the others. Pitts and Meeks have already retreated back into fiddling with part of their little radio. The buzz from the bourbon has kept things jovial so far. Once it starts to wear off this poetry shtick is going to get old pretty fast.

Charlie drones off poetry with half hearted sincerity. The girls don't seem to notice his indifference. They just fawn over the stolen words. Charlie prides himself for this. He's kept up appearances so far. If he were a lesser man, he would have fallen for the girls, but not Nuwanda! Nuwanda doesn't put up with such petty things. Nuwanda can love anyone and everyone but why would he when he has bigger plans? He's heading in the right direction. This time tomorrow he'll be the talk of the school and his friends will forget they ever doubted him - because he's right. All he has to do is prove it.

The night is draining away into a swirl of giggles, lipstick-smeared teeth, empty love poems, the smell of liquor on his breath and his friends' exasperated faces made round and pale by the moon- all mixing into a bubbling, twisting blur that is going straight down the drain into nowhere. At this rate, Charlie is growing a little bored but this was his idea in the first place, so he pretends to be invested. Cameron, Neil and Todd's awkward grimaces have not faded yet...but that's their fault if they don't know how to live a little.

Charlie's mind wanders to the same comfort as always: Knox blooming Overstreet. What is Knox doing right now? Probably lounging with his arm around Chris having finally won her over, leaning in for a shy kiss, her perfect hair tickling his cheek...not. He's probably standing in a corner with a cup of jungle juice in hand, too awkward to make a move and staying out of Chet Danbury's way. Maybe he wishes he had never met Chris - he wouldn't be the only one wishing that.

Charlie feels sorry for him and in the smallest crevices of his heart he wishes to leave to be with Knox. Spend the rest of the party by his side. Dance and drink and actually have fun. But then again, he has his own party fun right here! He's having a good time. The girls are having a good time. Who needs Chet Danbury's silly party when you can sit in a cave all night with lipstick melting on your cheeks?

In a dream Charlie will never tell anyone about, he rests his head

against Knox's chest like a pillow and feels it rise and fall. In this dream they laugh about nothing in particular and fill silences with soft reminders of love, like quick kisses on the forehead in the mornings. It doesn't matter where they work. It doesn't matter if they sleep in late or haven't seen their families in a long time because all they need is one another. If they're lucky, they'll spend time with their friends every other day of the week. It's like a religion to him now. He falls asleep to the same dream every night. It's embarrassing but at least it is his. It's all his own and no one can take it from him.

That's what this is all about. Charlie is doing this for himself and for his stupid best friend who doesn't know how many dreams have been about him. It's of no concern to the others, if you really think about it. Nothing to do with them at all. So why are they getting upset over nothing?

Gloria is stroking Charlie's hair, still giggling tipsily. Tina looks bored and is cradling the empty liquor bottle in her arms like a newborn baby. Meeks and Pitts are sharing an apple. Cameron is poking the dust with a stick, sighing loudly in dismay. Neil and Todd are sitting next to one another, flicking through the *Four Centuries of Verse* silently. Neil is reading the poems under his breath so quietly that Charlie can't hear him - but it must be something special because Todd's eyes are huge. Or maybe he just always looks like that around Neil. Charlie wonders vaguely if Todd has told Neil he loves him yet - he hasn't had the chance to ask him about it. He hopes for Todd's sake he has. Then again, maybe that isn't a good idea... Tina lights a cigarette and passes it around.

The night is moving on and with every passing hour, Charlie grows more impatient. He can change things soon. The wrongs in the world will be set right. He's always been destined for great things. To indeed be a God and all that. Knox will be back soon. Knox will love him soon. The thought makes Charlie's heart grow warm in spite of himself. He can't help it. Here's to hoping Chris said no and Knox realises he's looking in the wrong place. Or maybe the phone call from God will do that. It's worth wishing for. If Charlie can't change the will of heaven, he may as well move hell.

All he needs to do is wait a few more hours.

\*

October 27th 1959

Dear Diary,

Curfew is almost up and Knox still isn't back from the damned party. What is he doing? I'm trying not to think about it too much because my imagination will run away with me and I'll give myself more reasons to be jealous.

I'm disappointed with my friends. They don't like how I slipped the letter into the paper. They're worried I'm going to get them expelled.

There was so much I wanted to say to them and I couldn't bring myself to do it. So I'll say it all here:

No need to yell like an entitled dumbass, Cameron. What do you know about being alive? Besides following rules and complaining about everything? Why do we even keep you around? Look at you! You're a waste of good air! Everyone knows that you're a stinking rat. You would turn on us in a second if Nolan asked you to. I know you would.

Neil, you don't need to look so gravely wounded. This isn't about you! Do you really think life is supposed to be like this? Always demanding obedience and perfection? Why can't I live for just one day! Then I'll go back to being like you want; respectable and good and everything our father's want to see in a man. Besides - it doesn't matter if you get caught, your father will find a way to buy you out. He'll run circles around Nolan to get you into med school. You're going to be too good for the rest of us soon. You'll rise on up and forget our faces and I'll still be trying to crawl out of this hellhole. I can at least try for something worthwhile before Welton drains the life out of me.

-And by the way, you're as blind as Knox. I don't hate you, you're one of my closest friends but you can be so stupid. Todd loves you! He loves you more than any of our parents ever loved one another. It's so whole and pure and consuming. Did you know that? Have you noticed him staring at you in every class and blushing when you talk to him? Or how you're the only person he can truly be himself around. I hope you notice that. I hope you realise how much he loves you with his whole heart. You could not do anything worse - not even break every rule and get expelled- than not love him back. But you're stupid and things never work out and why should a boy love another boy, only if it's to lead to pain?

You could close your gaping mouths, Meeks and Pitts. You both are on your ways to Yale or Harvard or whatever place they take the bright

kids, the big names of the future. I'm a fool to think either of you would understand how I feel. Why I do things. Why I don't do things. How I sleep at night trying to weigh up a future that I'm not fit for. I want the security you both have in each other. The knowledge and brains and whatever it is that you guys share, which makes you work together like two halves of one whole. Where is my other half?

And last but not least, Todd. You're breaking my heart, Anderson! You look so confused and concerned - don't you dare act like you didn't know this was coming. This is what I am now! I'm not like you are - quiet and agreeable and liked. I'm not able to keep my head down and pretend like my heart doesn't tear itself apart whenever Knox is in the same room! I don't have to think for one second about whether I love him. I don't have to press my lips to his to taste longing because I already know what it is. I have no doubts about how I feel anymore. And I shouldn't have to apologise for it. I shouldn't have to sit and watch him pass me by. You can't stop me from publishing the letter in the paper - I told you I had a plan. This is it. I intend to stick to my word. I thought you of all people would understand!

I didn't even tell them about the phone call I've got planned. Who knows what they would have said if I told them. Cameron is asleep, I'm surprised he didn't head straight to Nolan's office to fink. What if he rats me out tomorrow before I pull the phone call? I hope he has the decency to let me carry out my fun. After that he can lick Nolan's shoes all he wants. Jerk.

I can't wait to see Nolan's wrinkly tortoise face when he demands to know who wrote the letter in the paper or how shocked his watery little eyes will be when I say the call is for him. Everyone will love it. Knox will love it. I can deal with anything- the end of the whole world- after that fact.

Now, I wait for Knox to return, to hear all about the big party and Chris and watch his eyes shine like stars. I'll stay up all night if I have to. Some things are worth losing sleep over.

This is one of them.

From yours truly,  
Nuwanda

"Psst! Knoxious!" Charlie hisses.

It is approaching twilight hours. Everyone else is fast asleep, including Dr Hager who does the night watch. The silence in the hallway is like being back at home. That's not a good thing. There's no light, not even from the moon...she must have grown tired of waiting for Charlie to sleep and called it a night. He doesn't blame her. Right now it's just deep black and the sound of Charlie's frenzied heart pounding. He might throw up if he has to wait much longer.

Knox is walking up the hallway. The way his shadowy form moves gives him away. Charlie would know it anywhere.

"Knox!" Charlie hisses again, trying to get his attention, "How did it go?"

The blur of shadow slows down. The steps are heavy. Something is wrong.

"Charlie?" It's muffled. Charlie moves down the hall. He doesn't care who can hear his hurried footsteps on the varnished oak floors. Something is wrong. His heart is pounding for a different reason now - it's panicked. *(Something is wrong.)*

Knox is just standing there like a statue in the dark. He reeks of booze - they both do. Charlie grabs his shoulders, *(Why are they so stiff?)*, almost ready to shake him when he hears it. A soft wince. It's so small and helpless. His heart drops fast as a stone. *(Something is wrong. What is it-)*

It is hard to see in the pitch dark but they're close enough that Charlie can make out the shape of Knox's face; his messy hair and his wide eyes. His hand shields his nose clumsily. Something on his hand glistens in the dark, like a treacle but not as thick...like fresh blood.

"You're bleeding." His bourbon-heavy whisper is low. The smell sours in silence. Knox's shoulders are stiff - it's like holding onto a brick wall.

"Who did this to you?" Charlie's heart has dissolved and pooled into his shoes, a slick heavy mess, like rough cement. The excitement is retreating - protective rage is taking its place. The heady rush it's giving him is one he is familiar with-

*(..an outstretched hand flying through the air, red hot like an arrow..)*

"What happened? Knox?"

Knox won't lift his gaze from his shoes.

"Here, please let me just-"

Charlie reaches out. He isn't sure what for, but he reaches all the same. To take Knox's trembling hand or to kiss his cheek and wipe the blood away. The blood that Charlie wishes was his own because Knox doesn't deserve this.

*(..after a while he learns to get used to the blood..)*

Knox pulls back with another soft wince. Charlie's hands freeze mid air.

"Please let me help you. I'll be gentle. Just let me help-" He is pleading now. His father would scoff at how soft he's being but Charlie doesn't give a shit. Knox is hurting. He doesn't care how soft he looks or how he shouldn't act this caring. He just wants to help.

Whoever did this will be sorry. They'll regret the day they were born. No one hurts the people he cares about and gets away with it. He isn't going to make that mistake again, not after-

"I'm fine, Charlie." Knox's voice is thick. He moves down the hall to his dorm room, stepping past Charlie, who moves to catch up. Why is Knox being so cold? Did Charlie do something wrong?

How is it that just hours ago Charlie had been fixing Knox's tie and watching his eyes shine in excitement? Was it really earlier that he had wanted to admit he loved him? To shut him up about the stupid party that seemed to be the big end of the world? And now here they are and there's nothing to show for it.

"What about Chris?"

Knox stops dead in his tracks, in front of his dorm door. Smug jealousy threatens to overtake Charlie because he knows this is the Big Question. This thing they've both been waiting on for days. Of course Knox will talk to him now. He has to. Charlie can't see his face when it's turned away from him but he can picture a fleeting look of hopeless puppy-eyed infatuation because this whole Chris situation is going nowhere. It never was in the first place.

"I kissed her."

It's like he's been shot. He's a dying animal, riddled with bullets and left for dead in a forest clearing, waiting for the final blow.

"You're kidding."

Suddenly moving down the hall doesn't seem important anymore. Nothing is important anymore.

"I kissed her, Charlie." Why is Knox's voice so far away? It's sounding from deep within the distortion of a tunnel, right next to his ears and a million miles away at the same time.

*(..the world shattering then repairing itself in only a second..)*

"She didn't know." Knox adds.

Charlie almost doesn't catch it.

"Wait, what?"

He can't do this. He doesn't want to start chiseling away at the idea of Knox he has spent so long building. If he starts to do that it might fall apart completely, the swathes of perfection unraveling in his hands like dead leaves in the wind.

"She was asleep." The words are heavy.

Knox still hasn't turned around.

*(..a loud crash..is it furniture breaking? Or just the sound of knuckles on flesh?)*

"Are you crazy?" Charlie's voice is too loud for the night time. He couldn't give a damn. He can't blame it on the liquor either. He's shaking now. "It's one thing to be obsessed with her, Knox but you can't-"

"I messed up. I shouldn't have done it. I know that-"

"Who hit you then? Was it Chet?"

Charlie doesn't need to pull apart this idea that he's fallen in love with- it's already tearing itself apart. Maybe he was wrong to want to be so gentle and caring.

"Look, Charlie. I don't want to talk about it. Can we deal with this in the morning-"

In the morning there won't be time to talk, not after the paper gets out. There won't be time to say 'I love you' and 'I hate myself because of it.' Not tomorrow when chaos reigns. Not after that, in the hallways or the cave or the classrooms. The words will never leave his mouth. There will never be time for them.

"You deserved it."

*I am telling you this because I love you. If anyone should hurt you with the truth then it should be me, because we both know no one else would be stupid enough to try.*

Charlie may be a dying animal in the forest, but he knows how to stare down the barrel as the last shot is fired because what else is he meant to do?

*You deserved it.* It isn't a lie.

Knox turns towards him and in the dark he could look any way Charlie imagines; angry or remorseful or indifferent. He doesn't want to imagine it at all. Maybe Knox will speak and explain himself - but he never was that emotionally articulate. Charlie loved him for that.

"Knox, I-"

A light flickers on at the end of the hallway- Hager's office. It is surprising that it's taken this long to wake him up with the noise out here.

"Goodnight, Charlie."

The words are hollow. A door knob twisting, the dorm door opening and closing and then Knox is gone. No last guilty glance in his direction. No waiting around for a witty reply.

Charlie isn't sure of what he wanted to say anyway. His heart has been taken out and stamped on and there is no going back.

*He kissed her.*

He shouldn't be this jealous, especially since-

*He's a jerk.*

Then his feet are dutifully carrying him back down the hall and he is lying in bed. Cameron's snores are drilling through his skull. It's better in here than getting given a lecture by Hager. It isn't a good idea to

get told off now when that already awaits him tomorrow. Oh what a thing to look forward to.

The telephone and suitcase under Charlie's bed are sitting patiently. He is Nuwanda after all. The wait is almost over. He is an agent of chaos. A bastard son of the gods. A force to be reckoned with. Whatever he is, it's about time he put himself to good use. Make Mr Keating proud.

*If anyone should hurt you with the truth it should be me.*

Charlie sighs as his heart scrambles to piece itself back together. Recovery is usually fast, like a second nature, but it isn't working this time. The pieces won't fit right anymore. They are getting forced into something heavy that he doesn't recognize.

*I don't care.*

Then why is there such a sharp pain in his chest? Why is he shaking? Why is anger and denial eating up his insides?

*Are we just playing around out here? Or do we mean what we say?*

It's only a few hours until morning.

Charlie wishes he had stayed in bed and slept. It's too late for that now. The day is already waiting to be seized. All he needs to do is grab it with both hands and not look back.

It's that easy.

He doesn't have any reservations. Of course he doesn't. He's Nuwanda! He can do what he likes now. He just needs to cast Knox out of his mind, once and for all.

What has he got to lose?

Chapter End Notes

That was a wild ride.

I have opinions (mainly that Knox 100% deserved to get punched for acting creepy. Also that as much as I love Charlie, he can be an arrogant idiot sometimes.) and lucky for you, I get to write about it too! The joys of fanfiction!

The paintings in Charlie's fathers study are something like [these](#).

If anyone wants a Calamity Jane song that has queer subtext written all over it (if you ignore the actual context), then [click here](#)

That's all for the minute folks! Sorry for the wait again, my upload schedule has been abandoned completely. I hope you enjoyed this chapter! We're almost coming to an ending soon... only two chapters and an appendix left ••

# Call from God

## Chapter Notes

NOTE: this chapter touches on domestic violence, corporal punishment (same as the film) and general poor parenting. If you don't have the capacity to read about these things that is perfectly okay, please do not read on if you aren't able/comfortable. I have added this to the tags which I should have done a lot sooner. I've also included a link to Domestic Violence Help Resources in the end notes.

Love you all and I hope you are staying safe and know you are cared about! I'm really forming a parasocial relationship here huh?

Enjoy the latest chapter. The end approacheth soon. I would be lying if I said I'm prepared for it..

:)

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

28th October 1969

It's breakfast time at Welton Academy - which means the latest issue of *Welton Honour* has already been delivered as everyone shuffles into the dining hall. It smells like toast and butter. There is a newfound buzz in the morning air.

"Did you see it? In the paper? The letter?"

"-The Dead Poets Society! What kind of name is that? They sound like something my sister would listen to on the radio-"

"-I bet they're Russian spies! My father met a Russian spy once and this is exactly how they infiltrate our defences-"

"- girls at Welton! It would give me something nice to look at all day-"

It's more than a buzz. It's tangible excitement.

Everyone settles into their usual tables, arms crossing over one another to grab for the porcelain toast racks or sweet breakfast rolls. Chatter swells. Everyone is curious and conspiring. When's the last

time something exciting happened around here? It's *Dead Poets Society* this and *girls at Welton* that. It is like a wildfire of words in the air.

The now infamous Dead Poets Society sits in uneasy silence.

Pitts is the only one eating. He is wolfing down two rolls at once while Meeks watches, looking mildly charmed. Around them, every other student is chattering wildly, shouting over one another. The morning sun beams down like a spotlight.

Charlie clears his throat and butters a slice of toast with his left hand, to see if Cameron reacts. He doesn't. No one else does either.

He shrugs to himself and eats. The toast tastes like soggy cardboard in his mouth. No one will look at him.

Cameron is stabbing at his cereal with a spoon and muttering to himself. Meeks and Pitts are now trying to halve apples with their bare hands. Neil is fixing his glasses with a frown that lifts a little when Todd sits down next to him. No one speaks. Charlie takes it that they're all still upset about the fiasco last night. He doesn't really consider it a fiasco yet but that isn't the point. His friends are upset with him and it isn't what he wanted....but still, he isn't wrong so he shouldn't beg for forgiveness. This isn't about them anyway.

Everyone looks up at something-

"Knox? What happened?" Neil asks. Or maybe it's Todd or Meeks and Pitts or Cameron or all five of them at once.

Charlie risks a glance but keeps his mouth shut. Knox is a mess. His shirt is crumpled and his hair is tousled like he just rolled out of a bush. He looks exhausted. His bottom lip is busted - not his nose. That's an easy mistake to make in the dark. Charlie never claimed to be perfect. He thought he had every inch of Knox memorized but he was wrong. That point was proven last night; he does not know Knox like he thought he did. Why does that fact hurt so much? It's the truth. But Charlie can't help feeling a little guilty. Besides, Knox's lip does look painful, coloured deep inky purple and blotchy crimson and swollen more than twice its normal size. At least there's no more blood smeared across his face.

*You aren't supposed to care about him anymore, remember?*

Charlie remembers his voice shaking when he spoke and the way he had reached out pathetically. He remembers how last night he wanted

(still wants) to love Knox against his better judgement. The shame is making his toast taste worse than it already is.

*"Please let me help you. I'll be gentle. Just let me help-"*

Knox is shrinking a little under the weight of the table looking at him expectantly. He clears his throat and stammers a little

"I, um-"

Pitts finally manages to half his apple somehow and it breaks it in two with a sharp crack. He grins.

*Come on Knox, just say it.*

"I kissed her."

The table implodes.

"You did what?!"

"I knew you had it in you!"

"When's the wedding?"

Knox looks like he's drowning in the attention. Charlie waits for him to crack and finish his little confession. He kissed her and she didn't even know and then he got punched in the face. Go on, tell them.

"It's not...I didn't realise-" He stammers.

"All students to the hall immediately!"

Hager's voice sounds from the dining hall doorway. In a second, everyone is rising from their seats, trying to choke down the rest of their breakfasts.

Unfortunately Knox will have to wait.

The chatter of the other students passes through the air.

"What's going on?"

"I'm not even finished my toast! This better be good."

"This is probably something about that Dead Poets Society."

Cameron seems to be on the verge of having a heart attack. Neil and

Todd share a glance- fear? Worry? Since when were they so in tune with one another anyway?

"Wait. What's going on? Did you guys get caught last night?" Knox stands up.

"Worse than that. We could be all expelled, for some stupid joke." Cameron grumbles darkly.

Knox looks confused. Pitts wolfs down the other half of his apple hastily. Meeks pockets a breakfast roll. The Dead Poets Society looks grim. Everyone is shuffling out of the dining hall and into the lecture hall sluggishly. It smells of boyish must and varnish and centuries of dead dreams.

They file into their pews. Charlie knew this would happen. The suitcase and the telephone are right at his feet under the bench in front of him. He is one smart guy.

"A joke? I don't understand-"

"Well, which one of us do you think would do something that stupid?" Cameron snaps.

"You guys wouldn't, um.." Knox could say that he doesn't think any of them would risk their places at Welton for this. That they're his friends they wouldn't do something this reckless. What kind of moron does that?

-And then his eyes fall on Charlie and he doesn't need to say anything at all.

It's going to be worth it, don't worry. Things will work out. This is just the beginning. I'm sucking the marrow of life aren't I? This is what we are supposed to be doing. We may as well smell the roses on the way into hell.

"Charlie? What did you do?"

Charlie just shrugs and looks away. He can explain it all later. Now is his moment. It is crucial and it has to work. It has to. He is deliberate and ready for this. He is calm and collected. He is afraid of nothing.

They sit in their pews. His friends look like they're waiting on death

row. They won't look at him, except for Knox who is shooting him desperate looks. Charlie feels reassurance settle on him like a divine gift. Who needs love when you can have this? This walk on the edge, a breath away from danger? Being daring and unpredictable and open to going out in a burst of flames. Living isn't being in love with a boy. How can it be when all that has brought is pain?

Somehow Nolan and the rest of the staff have appeared. They must have just walked in but Charlie was too busy not being in love to notice. Mr Keating is there. Charlie resists the urge to wave. Now Nolan is standing, casting a look that looks like death. He puts on his glasses and clears his dusty throat.

Living isn't being in love with a boy. But approval from said boy would certainly make life easier. Charlie craves the imagined attention. Even a smile from Knox would lay all his worries to rest (and how he despises himself for that.) Charlie is calm and collected. He is also an arrogant mess.

"In this week's issue of Welton Honour there appeared a profane and unauthorised article-"

Everyone looks stony and serious and decidedly bored.

Good.

It's time.

\*

The silence when the phone 'rings' is like he imagined it would be. Just the shocked and stunned sound of nothing at all. It's like he's cradling the whole world in his hands. It's fragile. He's got to handle it carefully. Doesn't want to fumble and drop it now, does he?

"Welton Academy, hello? Yes he is, just a moment-"

Watery blue eyes squinting at him from the podium, overflowing with cold, cold anger. Charlie holds back a lofty smirk - he can save it for later.

"Mr Nolan, it's for you! It's God!"

All of his friends are staring blankly ahead. They're scared.

Now for the kicker. The punchline. The end and beginning of all things.

"He says we should have girls at Welton."

Laughter ruptures through the hall. Cheers of agreement bubble up and spill over into one another. Someone claps him on the shoulder encouragingly. Someone else takes the phone from his hands, marvelling like it's a sacred object. Everyone is a jostle of movement; nudging one another and grinning.

Charlie looks to his friends.

None of them are even smiling. Neil has his head in his hands. Cameron looks like he might drop dead. Meeks and Pitts are dumbfounded. Todd is frowning. They don't like it. They aren't amused, not when their lives are on the line.

And now, worst of all is Knox.

He isn't laughing. Why isn't he laughing? This is all for him. Does he not understand that? All of this was for him, all to win him over and he isn't laughing. Charlie shouldn't want to impress him anymore. It was wrong to ever love him in the first place. Now it's even worse.

Charlie did good. He did really good. The laughter around him is still rising. He's truly made it and gotten the admiration he deserves. Everyone will remember this for a long time to come. He has seized the day like he should. So why does he feel so unhappy?

\*

"Count aloud Mr Dalton."

When's the last time he did this? His first year at Welton? A few times since then? The paddle is going to sting with every landing. Counting aloud will start to lose its coherence after the number six. Walking is going to be hell for the next few days. Charlie thought that he had forgotten the details but it's as if he has wiped away the dust and brought the memories back and good as new. The thought of getting a paddling wasn't enough to keep him out of trouble when he first started at Welton, when he used to be late to every class on purpose just to argue with whatever teacher he had. Here he is again, causing trouble. Some things don't change.

The first strike makes a swoosh on it's way through the air-

*"What is the meaning of this?"*

*Charlie's father's voice is sharp. He isn't quite furious yet but it's only a matter of time. The report card in his hand is getting crumpled.*

*Charlie shrugs, "I find math difficult sometimes."*

*"Look at me when you speak, Charles. I can't stand being disrespected."*

*Charlie forces his eyes away from the floor. He stares at his father's forehead blankly - he can't bring himself to make eye contact.*

*"I find math difficult sometimes." He repeats stiffly.*

*"Oh really?" The tone is icy. "You've been at Welton for a whole year! They're one of the finest schools the state has to offer! Do you know how hard I work to make sure you get a good education? Do you?"*

*"I know, father."*

*"Are the other boys as slow as you are? Is it your classmates? Are they a bad influence? I thought Tom said that Neil is a smart boy."*

*Neil is smart. It doesn't matter how much he or Charlie's other friends try to help. Math isn't his thing.*

*"It's just one exam." His voice is so small that the explosion which follows drowns it out completely.*

*"One exam? You know how important your school work is! How are you ever going to become a lawyer if you don't work for it? Are you really that stupid? Are you trying to put me to shame?"*

*Charlie bites down on his tongue hard. Drops of blood wash over his teeth.*

*"Well, Charles? Are you trying to embarrass me?"*

*"No, father." The blood tastes like watery copper. His tongue stings.*

*The report card shakes in the clenched fist that holds it. The first shameful report of many to come. Charlie will do better, he swears. He'll do his best. He won't make stupid mistakes. He isn't good at math but he won't let his father down. He really won't, he swears-*

*Then the next paddle blow and the next one and the next. It hurts*

more than he remembers. Charlie can't cry. He's the funny friend, he isn't supposed to cry. He is his father's son and he can't embarrass him like that.

*It's summer. No school. Charlie's friends write to him but he is slow to reply. His excuse is that he is busy wooing girls and making his way up in the world. That's a lie of course.*

*It could be any summer. He could be eight years old or fifteen. They all are blurred with the same memories.*

*Mother coming home from church or from running errands at the grocery store on the corner. Mother doing the laundry or cooking the dinner or sewing the holes up in Charlie's trousers. Mother with her trembling hands and her flitting gaze whenever the radio plays too loudly.*

*Then comes the storm without warning. A crash. The palm of an outstretched hand flying towards her face, red hot like an arrow. Chairs get thrown. His father's fists know how to draw blood. Booming shouts from one party, the thin cry of protest from the other.*

*Charlie would be at the dinner table, staring at his food, or in the bathroom trying to remember how to breathe or frozen on the stairs and waiting for it to be over.*

*It is like this every summer. The world shattering and repairing itself over and over on a loop. He tells his friends he's too busy to write - it's partially true. As the years go on, he'll do anything to get out of the house. He flirts with the girls in town and dreads returning home when it's dark. At least when they kiss him it makes everything fade away, even if it is only for a minute or two.*

*Charlie learns to get used to the blood after a while. He learns how to get rid of the stains from his mother's clothes and how to soothe everything over after the cloud of fury that is his father passes through the house.*

*If he can't stop it from happening, what else can he do but try to soften the hurt that always comes after?*

Then he can see Knox, as if he's right in front of him with his face a bloodied mess, pushing Charlie away.

He sees Knox full of stupid joy as he sighs, "She was thinking about me!"

He can see Knox laughing and messing his hair up, squeezing his shoulder with a smile. Then there is Knox full of shame at the breakfast table this morning. Knox following Chris around even though he shouldn't have. Knox sharing a cigarette on the soccer grounds and talking about the future. Knox kissing Chris even as she sleeps because what the hell is wrong with him?

It's all Charlie can see.

"What is the Dead Poets Society? I want names."

He keeps his mouth shut, bites his tongue but not hard enough that it will bleed yet. He knows to build up the pressure, not just bite through straight away.

The Dead Poets Society are his friends. He can't fink on them. He's hurt them all enough as it is.

They probably hate him now. He understands why. He would hate himself too. Hell, he does already. He loves his friends more than he could ever let on and this is how he repays them?

"I want names, Dalton. Who are they?"

Charlie isn't going to give their names away because he knows how much he needs his friends. He does love them, as stupid as it sounds. He cares about them even if he doesn't know how to show it. He is made up of them, of things so small that he is a walking mosaic of everyone around him.

He ties his tie the way Neil showed him to do in their first year here. Meeks is the one who patiently taught him basic maths. He knows about so many musicians because Pitts always talks about them. He always pockets food from the table because that's what his friends did first. He tries to seize the day because he knows that every morning Todd wakes up and reads that same motto from a piece of paper under his pillow. Charlie loves cherry ice cream on sunny days because the boy he loves loved it first. Neil taught him about every Shakespeare play and now he can name each one by heart. It was Meeks who slipped him answers for exams and then never wants to hear thanks for it. Pitts is the one who showed them all how to dance. Charlie

reads poems because he knows that Todd does too. He is a puzzle of the people he loves. Isn't there something so good about that? Little things he does, he does because someone else that he cares about did it first.

He isn't going to give their names up. No matter how much it hurts. No matter what will follow because it. All Charlie can think about is how he loves his friends. They'll probably never know how much. He is too proud to tell them.

If he isn't going to be expelled, he can at least save them all from expulsion too. The Dead Poets Society wouldn't be much of a society without all of its members. Charlie couldn't live with that. Anything but that.

"The names. I know you know who this society is. I want names."

The paddling is really starting to hurt now. Charlie's tongue is bleeding, he bit down too hard to stop himself from wincing.

Will his father be hearing about this incident? Charlie isn't ready to consider that. He probably never will be. What did Mother say to him on the first day of term? *"Promise me you'll behave yourself."* She is going to be more than disappointed.

Charlie burns with something else now. It isn't the desperate love that's kept him afloat for so many weeks. It is shame. Did he really think this would accomplish anything? This is what he gets for being so stupid. For being so wrong. He could never be loved back, not for all the stupid pranks in the world. Why did he think he could?

God, he's tired.

\*

October 28th 1959

The prank didn't work.

I don't want to talk about it.

Nuwanda.

Chapter End Notes

Wooh. Heavy chapter. Charlie's father? I will personally feed him to a great white shark one day.

Thank you for reading! See you soon!

[Domestic Violence Resources](#)

# And The Powerful Play Goes On

## Chapter Notes

Enjoy the last chapter of this fic! (Sources appendix should be up soon) I can't thank everyone enough for their support! :)

**\*\*In honour of Snowblaze's lovely comment below: don't forget to peak the Unrequited Love tag! It's not going anywhere quite yet my lovelies!\*\***

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

4th November 1959

*I don't want to talk about it.*

Charlie has made his mind up. He does not want to talk to anyone about anything ever again - he also wants to talk and talk and never stop. He wants to be cared about, unconditionally, without having to be funny or do stupid things - he wishes everyone would pretend he doesn't exist. He wants to get out of Welton so he can learn who he is - he wants to never leave because he is scared of what he'll find.

It has been a few days since the Call From God Incident. A week almost.

He still can't sit down without stifling a whimper. Walking is only becoming bearable now.

*(I want names, Dalton.)*

Charlie pushes it out of his mind. Not going there today. Not again.

*(Damnit Neil. The name's Nuwanda.)*

Charlie hasn't spoken to his friends much. He's been avoiding them, out of guilt, he supposes. They could have all gotten expelled because of him. He could have ruined their lives before they even started. That fact makes him uncomfortable.

It's not like he deserves his friends anyway. They are too good for him.

They carry his books for him between classes and bring him handfuls of stolen cookies from study group and they don't question the fact that Charlie speaks as little as possible to them. It's an unspoken understanding; the guilt and disappointment. They haven't said a harsh word to him since that night in the cave with the girls. Charlie has learned his lesson. His daring arrogance has fled far away, over the hills and into the horizon. What to do without it now, except mope around and feel sorry for himself.

*(Charlie? What did you do?)*

Charlie writes wearily in his diary one night: *If I am to abandon everything - friends, school studies, love- then maybe there will be nothing to abandon me in return! What if the best way to protect them is to leave them behind?*

Charlie knows that he didn't really mean what he wrote. He is taking dramatic liberties of course. And besides, his friends wouldn't let him abandon them. They're too stubborn.

So now Charlie sits in his dorm, staring at the ceiling vacantly. The others will be back from study group in a few hours. They'll hand him cookies and make jokes like most evenings. He will try to forget about the trials of the past few love-struck months until then. That's all he's been doing for the past week anyway. Not that it's working, not that he really wants it to.

*(I kissed her.)*

*(You're kidding.)*

Charlie decides to take a walk. He could use the fresh air.

\*

Wind blows over Vermont lazily. It's the first days of winter - not cold enough for heaped bowls of stew and breaths condensing in the air, not warm enough to lounge around the grounds with a textbook as a sun hat and wish for lemonade.

The forest, it turns out, is a good place to sit and smoke. Who would've guessed?

Charlie sighs and tips the end of his cigarette, watching tiny ashes drift down through the air. The trees - tall as the gods of old - sigh with him in the wind.

He leans against a tree and ignores the fact that it's going to start to hurt soon. Corporal punishment really *is* a pain in the ass, eh?

It's a bad joke. He has been running low on material lately. Nolan knocked the humor right out of him-

"Hello? Charlie?" A voice calls from nearby. It's timid. Charlie almost rushes to stub out his cigarette and run back to his dorm but he would recognise that voice anywhere-

"Todd?" He calls incredulously.

Out of the thicket stumbles the one and only Todd Anderson himself, flustered and breathless.

Well isn't this quite the meeting place.

"I thought study group just started? What are you doing here?" Charlie tries not to sound so surprised.

Todd is definitely not someone he thought he might see stumbling through the forest on a November evening. Especially not after all the Call From God trouble. They've all been more rule-following than normal.

"I, um," Todd makes a few vague hand gestures in an effort to get the words out, "I wanted to, uh, talk to you. You're not yourself recently and I'm worried about you - well not just me, Neil is too, and well- I was going to visit you in your dorm but then saw you walking out here and um, yeah I ran after you.."

He fades out into an awkward silence, hands wringing themselves like they so often do. He looks earnest.

Charlie pictures Todd and Neil, talking in hushed tones about how concerned they are. The image is strangely heartwarming. He takes a drag and thinks it over for a second.

*I don't want to talk about it.*

He doesn't. Not all of it anyway. But it is impossible to say no to Todd. If he can't talk to him about all things in love and war, then who can he talk to? His diary again?

There's only one thing for it.

Charlie points to the tree stump next to him.

"Take a seat, my good man."

Todd sits. He grins as Charlie waves a hand theatrically. The normal Charlie is in there somewhere.

"Settle in, Anderson. You're going to be here for a while."

\*

He's spent months trying to tuck it all up inside and keep it sealed like a stuffed pillow. There's been endless nights of not sleeping, dreading what would happen if he shared what was going on. He's written rambling diary page after diary page in desperation. And now here he is, opening his stupid mouth and letting words he never imagined saying spill out of him. It feels like relief, like the weight of just existing has eased on his shoulders. It feels daring and subversive to even be speaking. But he can't help himself anymore. Maybe it's because Todd is such a good listener. Maybe it's because Charlie is tired of keeping everything inside. Maybe it's both.

"I love him." He lets the words take up space. "Well I did love him...I'm not sure where I stand on that now."

He's told Todd almost everything: that the call from God was all for Knox, about how every moment he could think of nothing else. About every stupid joke he made to get Knox's attention (including the saxophone recital) and how his heart became more and more leaded and heavy as time went on.

He has skipped some things, for his own sake. Like anything to do with his father or the diary. Like the 'communists and queers' drivel that lives in his mind just to haunt him. Those things he isn't ready to share yet.

"Knox is an asshole." Charlie notes.

It is true. He has told Todd all about the disaster of a party at the Danbury's. He didn't need to tell Todd it turns out- Knox confessed to it all while Charlie was in Nolan's office.

Todd looks serious. "Well, we all aren't talking to him. Not until he apologises to Chris."

"Really? All the Dead Poets?"

"Yeah. It was Neil's idea. It's for the best."

Charlie takes a drag. It is for the best.

"I don't think Knox is a bad person. Everyone makes mistakes but not like that. He really did something wrong and he needs to learn his lesson." Todd says.

It is true.

"Since when were you so worldly? You're spending too much time with Neil."

Todd blushes and then Charlie remembers what he meant to ask only days ago. The thing he had caught a glimpse of but didn't want to say anything. The way Neil's frown had melted at the breakfast table when Todd sat down-

"How is it going with Neil?"

Todd blushes furiously now and Charlie knows what's coming-

"We're seeing each other- I didn't know how to tell you...and well, we're really happy- What? Why are you looking at me like that?" Todd laughs nervously. His face is bright red.

Charlie could burst like a confetti canon.

"Todd! Congratulations! You're seeing one another! I knew you had it in you! I knew it!"

They're together. They're happy.

Todd grins, "Don't say it so loud!"

"Whoops! My bad," Charlie lowers his voice to a conspirational whisper, "You'll have to tell me everything! I'm so happy for you!" He really truly means it. His heart feels full all of a sudden with joy.

Todd is beaming. Him and Neil are in love! That fact seems to make up for anything else. It's flooding Charlie with some sort of crazy pride. Todd and Neil! Together! They have one another! Charlie had hoped so much that things would work out for Todd. He had spent so long wishing just one of them could get what they want. Here Todd is and it went well! Who would've thought?

"Well, we have to be careful not to get caught," Todd's smile fades a little in spite of himself. The pride and relief at them finding one another will have to exist here at Welton of all places. It won't be easy.

"I didn't know you were so good at sneaking around, Anderson." Charlie is glad that Todd laughs a little, "Seriously, you are full of surprises."

Todd is flustered and blushing. Charlie smiles. If anyone deserves some happiness around here, it's Todd. There's no better place to find that than Neil.

Todd talks and talks then, more than Charlie has seen him do before. The words seem to come easily when they're about Neil and love. Charlie can understand that. The way Todd's eyes light up are like stars winking in the night sky.

It turns out Neil and Todd aren't the perfect honour roll students that Charlie thought they were - they sneak out to the cave most nights so they can sit on the shabby floor and hold hands. It sounds sweet.

Neil, it turns out, is just as in love as Todd is with him. Star crossed lovers or what? They've hidden it pretty well.

"Does anyone else know? Meeks and Pitts didn't notice?"

Todd shakes his head and grins, "Pitts is busy. He's still trying to read *The Cat In The Hat* in Marlon Brando's voice. I think Mr Keating has really made an impression on him."

They both burst into laughter.

It makes Charlie think: where would they be without Keating? Somewhere a lot more boring. There would be no sucking the marrow of life or seizing the day. There wouldn't be a Dead Poets Society. There also would be a lot less pain, since without the DPS, Charlie would never have fallen in love. Would that be such a bad thing? Would it have happened anyway?

"I'm glad I can talk to you about it. I knew I wasn't the only one." Todd says quietly.

The only one. Charlie remembers that fear filling him night after night - that he's the only one to love another boy. That's he's doomed to be forgotten about forever. At least he has Todd and now Neil too. At least he isn't alone.

"There must have been others, like us. Some of them must be out there, living good lives right?" Charlie wonders why he says it out loud but he knows why: he wants reassurance.

"I guess so," Todd shrugs, "We could do that. Finish school and move far away. Then we won't have to worry as much."

That is what Todd and Neil will do. Living freely without being scared? Without looking over your shoulder every minute? Being able to say 'I love you' aloud without suffering for it? It seems impossible. Some day, a hundred years from now, people might hold hands in the street so the whole world will know of their love. Won't that be beautiful? Maybe in the future it will be better. Charlie hopes so. By then what will he be? Long forgotten. He wishes, vainly, that someone will remember him. His name won't disappear to dust. He was here and he loved the same as anyone else. That's all he wants.

Charlie shivers. It's a little cold out here. It's only November but the winter weather will start creeping in soon.

He aches from standing against the tree for so long. Is this what it's like to be old? All aches and pains. Like an old man yelling at kids to stay away from his lawn.

"Are you cold? Do you want to go back inside?" Todd senses Charlie's discomfort.

They've been out here a long time. Study group is probably over by now. It's getting dark. The sun has dimmed like a candle under a bowl.

"Five more minutes?" Charlie needs to finish out his cigarette. That, and prepare himself to return inside to a world without reassurance. Out here he can pretend Welton doesn't exist. Out here he knows he isn't alone.

"Sure." Todd nods and folds his arms.

Charlie can stretch that to ten minutes if he tries. Besides, it's nice to be able to talk to Todd openly, not just in whispers across the dinner table.

"How's Neil's play going? I saw you practising lines last week."

Todd's eyes light up against the twilight backdrop of the forest again. Charlie takes another drag and ignores the pain that's been building up in his legs. He can deal with that later. He just wants to forget about it all for a minute and let Todd talk into the night.

The love in the words is enough to keep him warm for a little while longer.

\*

Charlie lies in bed that night. Study group is over. It's quiet since Cameron is at an honour roll meeting...whatever that means. Probably a bunch of boys sitting around proclaiming their love for Nolan. At least Cameron seems to think it's important. Stupid idiot, Charlie thinks with a sort of begrudging respect. No one else around cares for the honour roll *that* much.

Charlie can't sleep since he's still aching from leaning against that tree for so long. Maybe he's the real stupid idiot around here. It was worth it to see Todd so happy.

A soft knock sounds against the door. Cameron never knocks that politely.

"Come in!" Charlie calls, "You know, Todd, I didn't think you would miss me this much already-" Charlie stops his little joke.

It isn't Todd that just closed the door behind him.

It's Knox.

"Oh." Charlie's throat makes a strangled noise of surprise. He suddenly feels stupid lying there in his pyjamas that are so small the cuffs barely reach his ankles.

What had Todd said? No one will talk to Knox. Not until he apologises to Chris.

"Charlie," Knox looks around awkwardly. He clears his throat, "I, uh

came to apologise."

"I'm the one you're apologising to? Me?"

Charlie wonders if Chet Danbury really punched Knox so hard that he knocked his brain out of place.

"I'm going to apologise to Chris soon, I swear. I've tried ringing the Danburys, but they won't answer. I'll make it up to Chris soon, I swear." Knox does sound honest. She probably never wants to see you again, Charlie wants to say.

"I wanted to say sorry that I haven't been there for you. I've been a terrible friend and a jerk and I understand if you hate me."

"Wow I've never heard you be so articulate, Overstreet."

*(Stop joking Charlie. You're being the asshole now.)*

Knox's eyes are big with...remorse? Huh. Not so fast.

"You messed up. Chris didn't deserve that. I think I'm justified in hating you for a while."

Knox nods but doesn't say anything.

"You need to apologise. You could have done it earlier but it still needs to be done. You need to show you're sorry, not just say it," Charlie sits up with a grimace (dramatic much?). He isn't going to tell him that he loves him.

"I know the others aren't talking to you until you apologise to Chris and honestly, I think they're right. If you want to say anything to me, say it now and then we can go our separate ways." It feels strange being so firm but he is serious.

"Look, Charlie. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I was drunk and it was a mistake. I'll never do anything like that again. Never. I'm going to apologise soon, I swear."

Charlie has nothing to say but, "Good."

He thinks about what Todd said earlier. *I don't think Knox isn't a bad person. But he really did wrong and he needs to apologise.*

"If we get out of here alive, I'd like to think you'll be a good person. Me too. We could both be better people."

Knox gives him a look. Confusion. 'If we get out of here alive.' He doesn't question it.

Charlie is tired after spending hours talking with Todd and now this. He's had enough chat for one day. And to think he ran his mouth endlessly until Cameron told him to shut up a week ago. It's about time he get back into that practise.

"Goodnight, Knox."

A weight drop from his shoulders for the first time in months. Separation will be good for him.

"Goodnight, Charlie."

He's too tired even to correct it to Nuwanda.

This is far from redeemed. But it's a start in a new direction. Or at least Charlie hopes so as he falls asleep.

\*

November 5th 1959

Dear diary,

Cameron is almost finished studying for the night so I'll try to keep this short. I'm not going to say that idiot has grown on me but...some things can change. Only a small bit. There is a mutual disrespect; I can work with that.

I have Mr Keating's class after Latin tomorrow. I'm looking forward to it. His classes are one of the best things to happen to Welton. To me.

Neil and Todd are out at the docks practising Neil's lines again. Thinking about how happy they must be together makes me feel happier. Who needs love when my two best friends have found it in one another? Isn't that enough to make a man cry?

A Midsummers Night Dream is only a few weeks away. We'll all be going to see it. I can't wait to see Neil do what he loves. I can't wait to get a glimpse at a life outside of Welton, even if it's only for one evening.

I have not heard from Father or Mother since the Call From God

Incident. Is this a good thing? Who's to say? Perhaps they don't know about it...or they do know and are withholding punishment until I return home. I'm not going to dwell on that much longer. I've only just gotten out of my stupor. (Vocabulary!)

I used to think it was a joke to write in here but it's helped a strange amount. All the love and hurt is all stuck inside in the words on the pages. Immortalised, I guess. Mr Keating would know a good way to put that. Or even Todd might have a more poetic way of saying it. I like having all the feelings here in one place. It reminds me that everything I felt and feel is real. It makes it less regrettable somehow. Like a polite reminder of just...things. The first Dead Poets meeting, all the times Cameron scolded me for not sleeping, Todd telling me how he felt about Neil and the way my heart survived all those weeks of dying. For some reason I don't understand, it is reassuring. I'm reminded that I exist as I am and for once, that is enough. Everybody needs a place, it shouldn't be inside of someone else.

Huh. I bet Keating would like that last line.

This is the last page in this diary. I didn't realise it would fill up so quickly. I need to get a new one. Where else will I spill all my darkest secrets?

I have to go now. Cameron is snoring over his books. Idiot. I can't even bring myself to be mad at him. Should I put a blanket over his shoulders or wake him up? It's hard to tell. He wouldn't thank me either way.

I'm signing off until I can find more paper, hopefully before Neil's play. I don't want you to forget it!

I'll miss you until then.

From Nuwanda, with love.

Chapter End Notes

;) )

I'm gonna miss u too Charlie.....

Thank you for reading!! This chapter was so hard to write because I've had such a blast with this fic but all good things

come to an end. I hope you've enjoyed it!

This isn't the end for Charlie or the others - I have some ideas lined up for this series in the future! I'm excited to write them (eventually lol)

Love you all <3

# Appendix

## Note from the Author

This appendix is probably a little silly. This fic is one in thousands and hardly needs this much extra resources but I love research and I figured someone out there might like it too!

I want to just say thanks again for reading! Writing fanfiction brings me so much joy lol. This is the longest thing I've written so I'm getting sappy (haha tree pun.)

Whether or not you check out the links below, have a nice day and stay safe!

**\*\*A note:** the way that the Dead Poets Society (film) exoticizes and treats indigenous American communities is wrong. I regret not expressing this in this fic. More importantly, I encourage you to support and listen to native people - such as acknowledging the lands you live on ([x](#)), and supporting indigenous activism such as the Land Back movement ([x](#)) and other decolonial movements ([x](#), [x](#)).

\*

## ***FURTHER READING AND WATCHING***

[Dating in the 1950s was no picnic \(CBCLife\)](#)

[Teenage Dating in the 1950s](#)

[AreTheyGay LGBT history by the centuries: 1950s](#)

[What Is McCarthyism? \(TedEd\)](#)

[McCarthyism \(e-international relations paper\)](#)

[The Lavender Scare explained](#)

[Lavender Scare article \(Times Magazine\)](#)

[National Archives Lavender Scare report](#)

[FiftiesWeb 1950s slang](#)

[How 1950s parents felt about their children](#)

[1950s Suburban Dream psa](#)

[Youth Culture in the 1950s](#)

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**MUSIC (For the Radio Free America fans and lovers of cheesy songs)**

[SPOTIFY PLAYLIST!](#)

[You Belong With Me](#) - Taylor Swift (but it's a Charlie/Knox/Chris edit.)

[Heather](#) - Conan Gray (acoustic version for added pining.)

\*

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!